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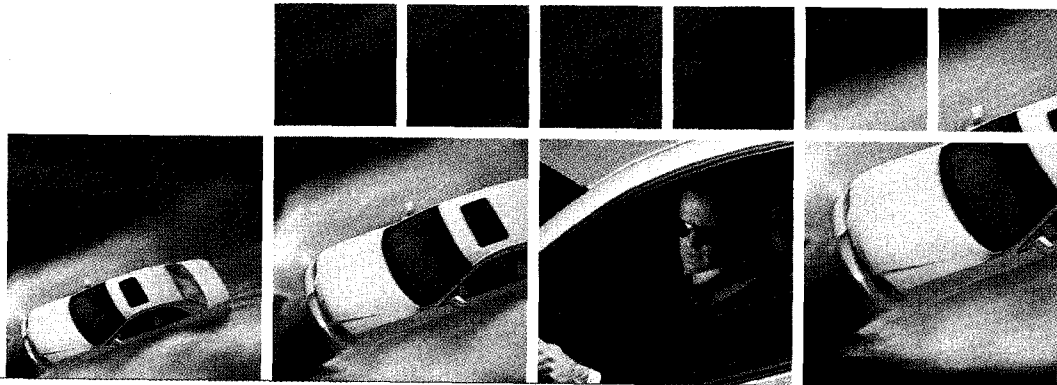
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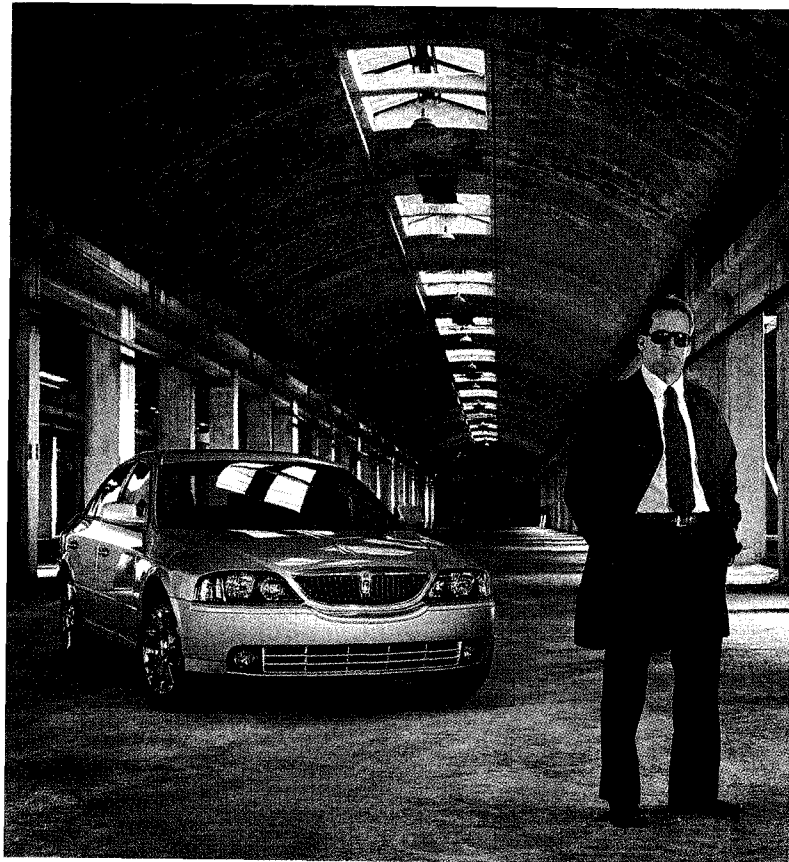


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CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Preston ("Capturing the Unicorn," p. 28), whose books include "The Hot Zone" and "The Demon in the Freezer," is at work on a book about climbing the world's tallest trees.

Todd Pruzan ("Global Warning," p. 34) is the co-author of "The Clumsiest People in Europe," which comes out in June.

Adam Green (The Talk of the Town, p. 23), a regular contributor, also covers theatre for *Vogue*.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 26) writes about business and finance. His book "The Wisdom of Crowds" will be out in paperback in August.

Lexi Rudnitsky (Poem, p. 60) died in January. Her collection of poetry, "A Doorless Knocking Into Night," will be published later this year.

Mark Ulriksen (Cover) is showing his art work as part of a group exhibit opening this month at Storyopolis, in Los Angeles.

Jonathan Weiner ("The Tangle," p. 42) received a Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction for "The Beak of the Finch." His most recent book is "His Brother's Keeper: A Story from the Edge of Medicine."

Sean Wilsey ("Peace Is a Beautiful Thing," p. 52) is an editor at *McSweeney's*. His memoir, "Oh the Glory of It All," comes out in May.

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John Cassidy (Books, p. 72) is a staff writer and the author of "Dot.Con," which is available in paperback.

Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 80) is the magazine's pop-music critic.

Roz Chast (The Back Page, p. 88) contributes regularly to the magazine. Her latest book is "The Party, After You Left," a collection of her cartoons. ♦



"I'm making an effort to limit my dependence on foreign vodka."

THE MAIL

RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

As a former pupil at public schools in Cupertino, California, I was struck by Peter J. Boyer's analysis of the current showdown there over religion in schools ("Jesus in the Classroom," March 21st). I recall that when I attended school in Cupertino, between 1979 and 1984, teachers held to the idea that Christianity and its symbols were appropriate in public schools. If you objected, you were labelled a troublemaker. The fact that officials at Stevens Creek Elementary now go to great lengths to avoid religious indoctrination is a sign of progress. Christianity has long been the dominant religion in America, and it is hardly surprising that many of its adherents resist ceding that position in today's multicultural and multireligious society. Still, giving up a little ideological ground and accommodating others seems a small price to pay for cultural diversity.

Sarah Wersan

Santa Barbara, Calif.

To what extent religious content is acceptable in public-school teaching is an issue that raises complex problems for all concerned. Rather than attempting to control what children see and hear through bureaucratic, legislative, and constitutional means, we should be prepared to teach them to think and examine for themselves. If we really want our children to receive a rounded education, the wholesale suppression of the fundamental human themes that religion presents seems not much less dangerous than outright proselytizing.

Robin Globus

Albuquerque, N.M.

Reading Boyer's article, I found it hard not to be curious about the confidence with which those on the Christian right cite allusions to a vague Creator in the Declaration of Independence as evidence that the architects of American democracy shared their religious outlook. In fact, such key figures as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson held views that would probably appall those who so readily invoke their authority.

Adams, in his diary, called the idea of Jesus' divinity an "absurdity," and Jefferson wrote (but never published) a book called "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," which was intended to establish that Jesus was a great and moral man but not the Son of God. In 1813, in a letter to Jefferson, Adams wrote, "Ye will say, I am no Christian. . . . Yet I believe all the honest men among you are Christians in my sense of the word." This highly equivocal opinion goes some way toward explaining the manifold contradictions of Christianity's place in modern America.

Sam Haselby

*Dept. of History, Columbia University
New York City*

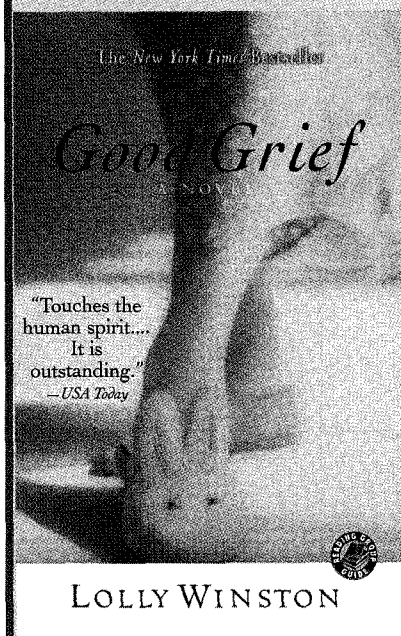
Boyer's article sheds light on some tactics and objectives of the religious right. The Alliance Defense Fund likely invested its considerable resources in Cupertino because it is a community of immigrants. The initiative was doubtless intended to send a message to those of other faiths that Christian evangelicals intend to use public institutions to promote their religion. This is the meaning of their clearly stated goal, to break down the "so-called 'wall of separation'" between church and state. Such activists have tried to turn religion in schools into a First Amendment issue. While it is true that a sermon, say, constitutes protected speech, the First Amendment actually does more to insure freedom from religion than freedom for it, where institutions funded by taxes are concerned. Citizens pay taxes not for their children to hear evangelical exhortations but for them to get an education.

Lawrence Swaim

*Executive Director, Interfaith Freedom Foundation
Fremont, Calif.*

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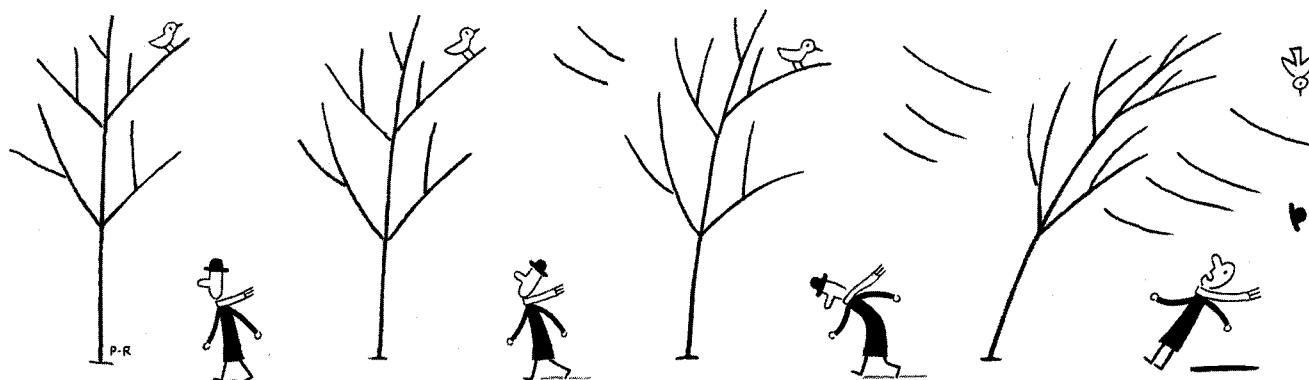
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



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THIS WEEK LIFTING EVERY VOICE

Ladysmith Black Mambazo first came to the attention of most Americans for their work on Paul Simon's 1986 album, "Graceland," and over the years the South African group's take on Zulu *isicathamiya* music, which sets the piercing tenor of the lead singer, Joseph Shabalala, against lush backing vocals, has earned them an international following. They have survived tragedy (Shabalala's brother and wife were both recently murdered)



The South African vocal group Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

and emerged as elder statesmen of African music. Their latest album, "No Boundaries," was performed with the strings of the English Chamber Orchestra; this tour will celebrate a decade of South Africa's freedom from apartheid. (Town Hall, April 10; see Night Life.)

GETTING HIS KICKS

The Hong Kong martial-arts filmmaker Stephen Chow is like a cross between Bruce Lee and Buster Keaton: he mixes eye-popping fight choreography (much of it leavened by computer-generated effects) and razor-sharp slapstick, binding the ingredients together with a winning comic persona that's more diffident and less effortful than that of his obvious forebear, Jackie Chan. Chow's

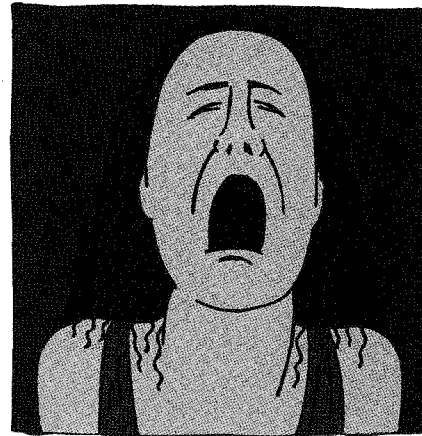


Stephen Chow's new martial-arts comedy, "Kung Fu Hustle."

last film was the brilliantly daffy "Shaolin Soccer"; in his new project, "Kung Fu Hustle," which was a hit in Hong Kong, he plays an aspiring young gangster in prerevolutionary China. (Opens April 8; see Movies.)

POLISH ELEKTRA

The Polish theatre group Gardzienice is known for combining dance, historically accurate music, and traditional theatre. In 2001, they caused a sensation at La Mama with their show "Metamorphosis." For this new piece, based on Euripides' "Elektra," the company's director, Włodzimierz Staniewski, blended modern and ancient elements by researching the way text and singing were mingled in the original Greek. (La Mama, starts April 7; see Theatre.)



"Elektra," a new production from Gardzienice, at La Mama.

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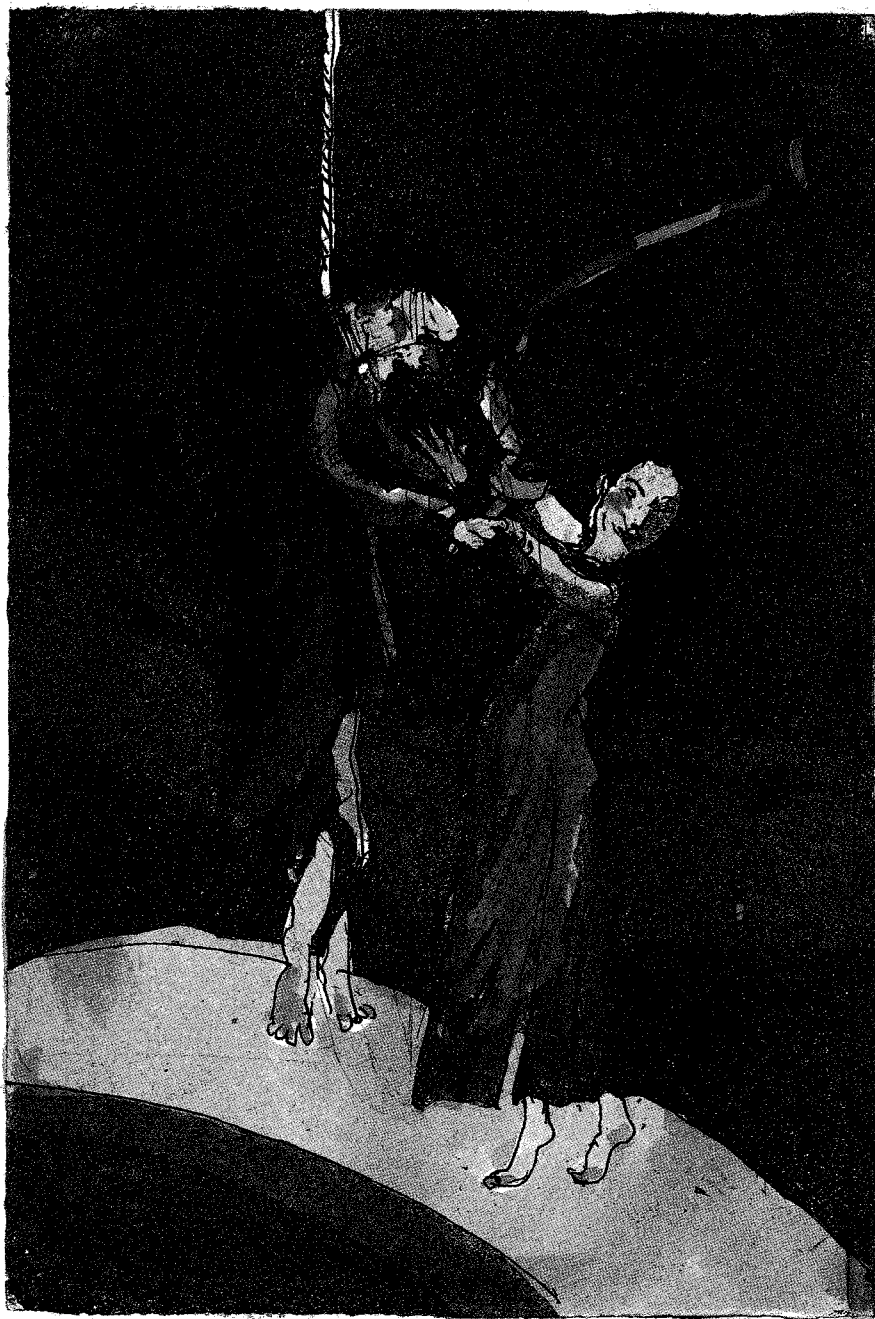
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Martha Graham Dance Company begins its two-week season at City Center.

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ABSOLUTELY FASCINATING

The sharp-witted trio of British chanteuses known as Fascinating Aida—Adele Anderson, Dillie Keane, and Liza Pulman—bring their new show to New York. Previews begin April 6. Opens April 11 at 8. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG

A family-friendly musical based on Roald Dahl's film adaptation of the well-known children's story. In previews. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

ELEKTRA

Poland's avant-garde Gardzienice theatre company presents its adaptation of the Euripides play (see This Week). April 7-24. (La Mama Annex, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

THE FALSE SERVANT

Martha Plimpton, Bill Buell, and Paul Lazar lead the cast in Kathleen Tolan's new translation of the Marivaux play. In previews. Opens April 10 at 7. (Classic Stage, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS

Alan Alda and Liev Schreiber star in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of David Mamet's Pulitzer Prize-winning play. Directed by Joe Mantello. Previews begin April 8. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE GRAND DUKE

Blue Hill Troupe's revival of this rarely performed Gilbert and Sullivan operetta (the fourteenth and last they wrote together) takes place at the Teatro Heckscher of El Museo del Barrio—where the show had its U.S. premiere, in 1937. April 8-16. (Fifth Ave. at 104th St. 212-988-2012.)

THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA

A musical based on Elizabeth Spencer's novella about a mother and daughter who travel through Italy in 1953. With a book by Craig Lucas and music and lyrics by Adam Guettel. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

ON GOLDEN POND

James Earl Jones and Leslie Uggams play Norman and Ethel Thayer in a revival of Ernest Thompson's play about a family reunion at a cabin in Maine. Two previews on April 6. Opens April 7 at 6:45. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

ORANGE FLOWER WATER

A new play by Craig Wright (who writes for "Six Feet Under") is set in and around a bed, and tracks the collapse of two marriages. In previews. Opens April 7 at 8. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 212-868-4444.)

THE PILLOWMAN

In a drama by the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh, an official interrogates an author who writes disturbing stories about children. With Jeff Goldblum and Billy Crudup. In previews. Opens April 10 at 6:30. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

PRIVILEGE

The filmmaker and playwright Paul Weitz brings a new dark comedy to the stage, about the social fallout two teen-agers suffer when their father is convicted of insider trading. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

SOULS OF NAPLES

The American premiere of a wry comedy by Eduardo De Filippo (translated by Michael Feingold), set in crumbling post-war Italy, stars John Turturro. A Theatre for a New Audience production, directed by Roman Paska. In previews. (Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Natasha Richardson stars in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of the Tennessee Williams play. Edward Hall directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

TIERNO BOKAR

A new play by Peter Brook, about a Sufi mystic in colonial Africa, is a co-production of Brook's International Center of Theatre Creation and Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord. Performed in French, with English supertitles. Opens April 6 at 6. (LeFrak Gymnasium, Barnard College. Broadway at 117th St. 212-239-6200.)

WHAT OF THE NIGHT

Jane Alexander stars in a new play drawn from the writings of Djuna Barnes, created by Alexander, Birgitta Trommler, and Noreen Tomassi. An M.C.C. Theatre production. Opens April 6 at 7. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALL SHOOK UP

The spirit of Elvis lives on in a musical comedy set to his songs. Christopher Ashley directs. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

CALIGULA

The Classical Theatre of Harlem presents a new play about the notorious Roman dictator. (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 212-868-4444. Through April 24.)

CHINA DOLL

A theatrical tribute to the Asian-American actress Anna May Wong (on the centenary of her birth) stars Rosanne Ma. Directed by Tisa Chang. (West End Theatre, 263 W. 86th St. 212-279-4200.)

DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS

A gleeful translation of the film to the musical stage, with a good-natured score by David Yazbek and a comic engine revved by Jeffrey Lane's perky book. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/14/05.) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DOUBT

Cherry Jones stars in John Patrick Shanley's well-told tale about possible sexual abuse in a Catholic school. Doug Hughes directs. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

FAUST IN LOVE

With sly wit and surprising fidelity to Goethe's epic (if you ignore the flashy penultimate scene, which is set in Hell and involves puppets and sex toys), the director David Herskovits presents the second installment of his multipart treatment of "Faust." Faust (George Hannan) comes off as a likable fellow who tempts the eager virgin Gretchen (Eunice Wong) to

sample life's sweet pleasures. Mephistopheles (David Greenspan), dressed like a minor mafioso, is less sympathetic but makes for a gregarious guide to perdition. Adapted by Douglas Langworthy. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-358-3657. Through April 30.)

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

In David Leveaux's brilliant staging of Tennessee Williams's delicate "memory play," set in Depression-era St. Louis, Jessica Lange gives a brave and electrifying performance as the matriarch Amanda Wingfield, whose husband fled her, and whose son, Tom (Christian Slater), will soon follow suit. She uses her fine, slim body and her beautiful elocution to illustrate how hysteria can shoot through a person. How to explain Slater's hunky, shambling hero? He proves that he's more than willing to bend his stocky, powerful body to the steel of Williams's breathtaking cadences and runaway-train humor. The lovely Sarah Paulson plays Tom's crippled sister, Laura, and Josh Lucas plays the only other male figure in the play—the longed-for Gentleman Caller. When Tom flees, leaving Laura to her inner world, the heart breaks. (4/4/05) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOD HATES THE IRISH:

THE BALLAD OF ARMLESS JOHNNY

A farce by Sean Cunningham about the odyssey of a demoralized young man from Northern Ireland who has no father, no arms, and no prospects. With twelve original songs by Michael Friedman, of the Civilians. Will Frears directs. (Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl., west of Seventh Ave. 212-868-4444. Through April 24.)

GOING TO ST. IVES

In a quiet English cottage, a prim and proper eye surgeon (Vivienne Benesch) pours tea for an exotic guest, May N'Kame (L. Scott Caldwell), the mother of an Idi Amin-like African dictator. The two women hatch a plan to end the dictator's reign of terror and free political hostages. Lee Blessing's tortuous plot is overburdened with machinations but has moments of lucid power. Caldwell gives a remarkable performance as a woman whose maternal feeling has turned icy with time, but whose heart remains anguished by the choice she must make. Directed by Maria Mileaf, for Primary Stages. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HOT 'N' THROBBING

The final show of the Signature Theatre Company's Paula Vogel season explores the continuum between sex and violence. Charlene (the excellent Lisa Emery) is a single mom who writes erotic fiction. As she types her new screenplay, its seedy characters materialize in her living room alongside her two teen-agers. The play begins on a comic note, but the tone darkens when Charlene's abusive ex-husband, Clyde (Elias Koteas), smashes down the door. Vogel paints the encounter between the exes with creepy skill; gradually and affectingly she shows how one woman's bid for autonomy is destroyed by violence. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

JULIUS CAESAR

Denzel Washington stars in a new production of Shakespeare's tragic play. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS

A new play by Ron Hutchinson, set in 1939, revisits the tensions that raged during the writing of the screenplay for "Gone with the Wind." (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

MOSES: THE GOSPEL, HIP-HOP MUSICAL

Walter Robinson's high-energy gospel opera tells the four-thousand-year-old story from a modern, urban perspective, using a cast made up mostly of talented inner-city kids. The tale is told through gospel, jazz, hip-hop, break dancing, classical ballet, and capoeira. (Citigroup Theatre at the Alvin Ailey Studios, 405 W. 55th St. For tickets, visit www.mosesmusical.com. Through April 17.)

STEEL MAGNOLIAS

Delta Burke and Frances Sternhagen star in a revival of Robert Harling's play about the relationships between a close-knit group of women in the South. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THIS IS HOW IT GOES

An interracial love triangle is the subject of a new play by Neil LaBute that stars Amanda Peet, Ben

Stiller, and Jeffrey Wright. Directed by George C. Wolfe. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. Through April 17.)

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

Bill Irwin and Kathleen Turner give remarkable but uneven performances in this revival of Edward Albee's 1962 play about a sparring couple—George and Martha—who wear their marital war wounds like badges of honor. They haven't found Albee's nuances yet, but they will, given a long run. The play itself, however, may age less well. Mores have changed, and, while George and Martha still disturb, they have lost their power to shock. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALTAR BOYZ

Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.

AVENUE Q

Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

DEMOCRACY

Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.

DESSA ROSE

Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.

GOOD VIBRATIONS

Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

HOUSE/LIGHTS

St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Dumbo, Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. (Through April 10.)

MAMMA MIA!

Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT

Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NINE PARTS OF DESIRE

Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200.

ORSON'S SHADOW

Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS

St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

ROMANCE

Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.

THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING)

DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.

TWELVE ANGRY MEN

American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.

WICKED

Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

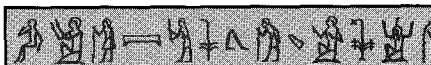
WOMAN BEFORE A GLASS

Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

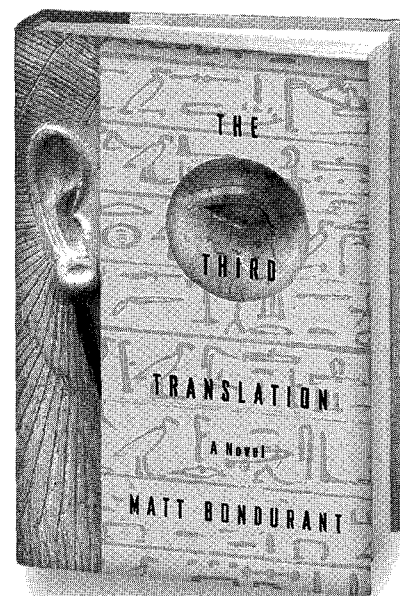
DANCE

MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY

Since Martha Graham died, in 1991, her company has overcome numerous legal and fiscal challenges, but one artistic trial remains: adding to the repertory. For its two-week season at City Center this year, the troupe has hired its first outside choreographer—another Martha skilled at resonant gesture, the Pilobolus co-founder Martha Clarke. Her "Sueño" draws its imagery from Goya's "Los Caprichos," complete with hunchback. The season also features a revival of "Deaths and Entrances," Graham's frenzied abstraction on the lives of the Brontë sisters, with new costumes by Oscar de la Renta. A live orchestra accompanies the dances. ♦ April 6 at 7, April 9 at 8, and April 12 at 7:30: "Errand Into the Maze," "El Penitente," "Sueño," and "Sketches from Chronicle." ♦ April 7 at 7:30: "Cave of the Heart," "Primitive Mysteries," and "Appalachian Spring." ♦ April 8 at 8: "Embattled Garden," "Deaths and Entrances," and "Sketches from Chronicle." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through April 17.)



Decoding an Egyptian hieroglyphic is just the first clue to the deadly puzzle.



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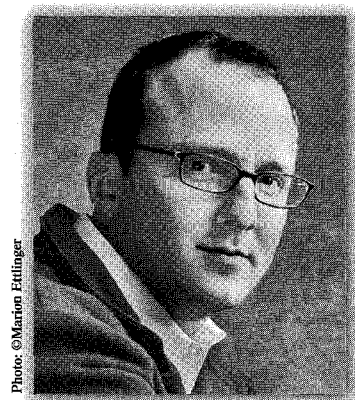


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"THE CONTRACT (THE PIED PIPER)"

The National Ballet of Canada comes to BAM for the first time in more than forty years, presenting a mystical evening-length work by the company's artistic director, James Kudelka. Inspired by the old children's tale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the piece relays the story of a charismatic faith healer who mesmerizes a community of afflicted children. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. April 5 and April 7-8 at 7:30 and April 9 at 2 and 7:30.)

RICHMOND BALLET

In its Joyce debut, the thirty-year-old troupe presents two programs stocked with dances by six contemporary choreographers. Colin Connor's "Streets and Legends" is a Scottish jig in toe shoes. In William Soleau's "Nuevo Tango," performers dance with bar stools to the strains of Astor Piazzolla. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 5 at 8. Through April 10.)

DANCES BY NEIL GREENBERG

With "Partial View," Greenberg continues his long-standing exploration of film and multiple perspectives. As live and prerecorded video footage by John Jesurun plays, four dancers execute Greenberg's Cunningham-influenced moves in a randomized pattern, like molecules. The evening also includes the companion piece "Partial View Solo," performed by the choreographer. Both works include original music, centered on the harp, composed by Zeena Parkins. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 6-9 at 7:30. Through April 16.)

LES BALLETS GRANDIVA

This all-male comedy ballet troupe and its older cousin, Les Ballets Trocadero de Monte Carlo, share a concept, a number of jokes, and even some repertory. They also share a growing technical competence. The younger company's season at Symphony Space includes parodies of Petipa, Fokine, Balanchine, and MacMillan. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-581-3836. April 11 at 8. Through April 16.)

DANCE COLLECTIVE

The group presents old and new work, including the premiere of a six-part dance for six women, titled "The Call," with video projection by Bryan Hayes and a score by the Brazilian composer Milton Nascimento; and the solo "Black Crow," performed by Carol Nolte. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 212-627-4275. April 8 at 8 and April 9 at 8.)

OSMANI TELLEZ AND JULIETTE MAPP

The two choreographers appear in the "Shares" series at Danspace Project: Tellez, with "Thought Out," a piece that seeks to give a physical expression to surreal abstractions, and Mapp, with "One," a daring antiwar work in which scores of members of the dance community will join the choreographer, taking seats in formation onstage, repeating simple gestures, and moving in and out of the audience as they recite the climbing toll of war dead in Iraq. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. April 8-10 at 8:30.)

DANCES PATRELLE

The company has its spring season at Symphony Space. Highlights include the premiere of "An American Overture," set to music by Leonard Bernstein, with a solo by Marcelo Gomes, of American Ballet Theatre, and "Red Ellington" (1991), which has music by Duke Ellington and features the New York City Ballet dancers Jenifer Ringer and James Fayette. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 7-9 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

MAROON 5

This plucky California quintet is known for safe but soulful pop. They just won the Best New Artist award at the Grammys, which does nothing to insure their continued success. The award has a curse something like that of the Hope diamond—previous winners include Milli Vanilli, Christopher Cross, and the Starland Vocal Band. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. April 6-8 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

April 7 at 8: The flamenco guitarist Daniel Casares. (CAMI Hall, 165 W. 57th St., 2nd fl.) April 8 at 8: A night of Indian music with Shivkumar Sharma, a master of the santir (a hammered dulcimer) and the unmatchable tabla player Zakir Hussain. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St.) April 10 at 7: Ladysmith Black Mambazo (see This Week). The group will be joined by the singer, guitarist, and percussionist Vusi Mahlasela, who performs his original protest



The Kills bring their sparse blues-punk to the Bowery Ballroom.

music in six of South Africa's languages. (Town Hall.) (For more information about all shows, call 212-545-7536.)

TORI AMOS

The flame-haired siren may have been dismissed as a Kate Bush wannabe upon her early-nineties debut, but her extensive and eccentric body of work has allowed her to evade easy categorization. She's currently on the road in support of an accessible, autobiographical new album, "The Beekeeper." (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. April 8 at 8.)

MUDVAYNE

These rockers wear unsettling makeup onstage and go to great lengths to shock and offend whenever possible (they're notorious for appearing at the MTV Video Music Awards a few years ago in white dinner jackets splashed with fake blood). Their formula is hardly original, but that hasn't

stopped them from earning an avid following. (Roseland Ballroom, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. April 12 at 7.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—April 9: Garland Jeffreys is perhaps best known for his 1977 hit, "Wild in the Streets," but in recent years he has become a fixture on the stages of his home town, performing old and new material with renewed vigor. April 10: The powerhouse blues singer Shemekia Copeland. April 11: The bluegrass icon Ralph Stanley.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—April 7-8: Bloc Party is yet another British band with a fondness for the chilly post-punk of the nineteen-eighties. Like its comrades Franz Ferdinand and the Futureheads, Bloc Party trades in angular guitars and tensely danceable rhythms, but its music is topped with Kele Okereke's plaintive yelp. April 9: The Loser's Lounge pays tribute to Queen. April 11: The Kills. Alison (W) Mosshart and Jamie (Hotel) Hince are a lasciviously minded duo who kick up a loud, angry fuss despite a bare-bones approach. On their new album, "No Wow," the pair drag a drum machine into the bedroom and keep their brusque blues-punk hot and heavy. April 12: The country-rockster Tift Merritt.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—April 6: Glen Phillips, the former lead singer for Toad the Wet Sprocket, leavened his band's rather unexceptional pop with a rich, emotive voice that belied the silliness of the band's name (which came from a Monty Python sketch). Expect songs from his personal and appealing new solo album, "Winter Pays for Summer." April 12: Hyper-elastic vocals meet sludge-choked guitars in Fantomas, a heavy-rock supergroup for the adventurous set. It features the ex-Faith No More singer Mike Patton, the Melvins guitarist Buzz Osbourne, the former Slayer drummer Dave Lombardo, and the bassist Trevor Dunn, from Patton's other band, Mr. Bungle. Instead of playing straight-ahead heavy metal, however, Fantomas pride themselves on densely cinematic compositions that rarely—if ever—conform to conventional rock structures. Having already interpreted music from celebrated film scores, the band has devoted its fourth studio album, "Suspended Animation," to cartoon music. The results are dizzying.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—The party promoter and d.j. Oxy Cottontail is best known for helping the Philadelphia-based d.j. duo Hollertronix gain local fame in the past year. On April 6 her lineup includes Spankrock, a rapper-and-d.j. pair whose sound reflects the lyricist's relationship with the hip-hop stars Mos Def and Talib Kweli. With the New Wave-infused break beats of Kudu.

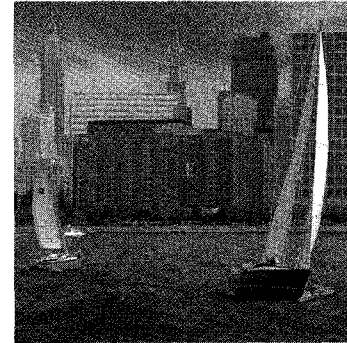
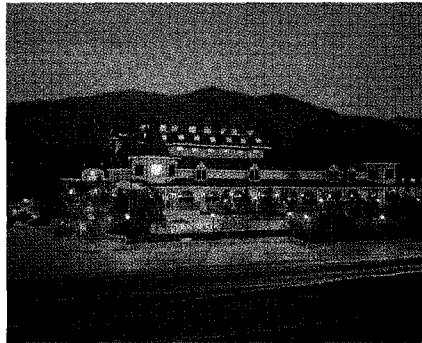
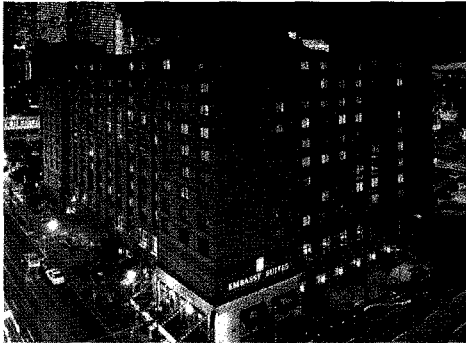
KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—April 5: A night of rhymes and

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beats from the streets of Israel. Hadag-Nahash (Hebrew for "Snakefish") is a hip-hop collective that practices a politically charged variety of rap. Rounding out the bill are a few Israeli expats, including the saxophonist Ori Kaplan and the drummer Tamir Muskat, veterans of several New York bands, including Firewater, Shor'neez, Big Lazy, and Gogol Bordello.

MAXWELL'S

1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—April 8: **The Sun**, Midwestern indie rockers who dragged synthesizers into the garage and added a contemporary flourish to their hook-laden guitar-based racket.



New paintings by Eric Fischl, at Mary Boone in Chelsea through April 23.

NORTHSIX

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—April 7: A brother-and-sister duo with an ambitious arsenal of influences, the **Fiery Furnaces**, from Brooklyn by way of Illinois, have become a celebrated indie-rock act in relatively short order. April 12: Approaching the midpoint of their third decade together, New York's own noise-rock stalwarts **Sonic Youth** continue to push the envelope. Splitting their energies between major-label albums and a proliferation of experimental side projects, Sonic Youth have managed to stay true to their adventurous roots without compromising or slowing down.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—April 9: The **Fiery Furnaces** (see Northsix).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—April 6-9: Steve Kuhn, an accomplished and respected modern pianist who predated McCoy Tyner in John Coltrane's first quartet, has grabbed more of the spotlight lately.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through April 10: No one is likely to label Michel Camilo a meditative stylist. The rampaging pianist regularly stirs up excitement with full-force Latin-flavored improvisation.

CARLYLE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wrap-around murals, and, though April 9, Betty Buckley.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Through April 10: **Kenny Barron**, the dean of mainstream pianists, begins a much deserved monthlong residency in the sleek new club named for his one-time employer Dizzy Gillespie. This week he's joined by the guitarist **Romero Lubambo**, the bassist **John Patitucci**, and the percussionist **Mino Cinelu**.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through April 16: **Tony Danza**. He sings, he tells jokes, he plays piano and trumpet, he dances; if you asked him to, Danza would probably recite Shakespearean

sonnets. He may not be world class in any of his on-stage abilities, but his infectious enthusiasm is ample compensation.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—April 7-10: Three generations of knuckle-busting bassists: **Richard Davis**, a favorite of musicians from Stravinsky to Elvin Jones; **Eddie Gomez**, best known for his work with Bill Evans; and **Avisai Cohen**, the backbone of recent Chick Corea ensembles. The drummer **Lenny White** and the pianist **George Colligan** assist. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul**.

LE JAZZ AU BAR

41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—April 6-17: **Dee Dee Bridgewater** has tremendous vocal talents, as well as energy, sex appeal, and vivacity to spare. Her shows are jazz-singing seminars that come in the form of a one-woman party.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Through April 7: The pianist **Cyrus Chestnut** can make any vocalist sound better, but he won't be doing any cosmetic touch-ups when he shares the stage with **Carla Cook**. She's a commanding performer with a taste for standards old and new, including lustrous renditions of Neil Young's "Heart of Gold" and Kurt Weill's "September."

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through April 17: The **Bill Charlap Trio** is about as good as mainstream piano jazz gets these days. Working with the bassist **Peter Washington** and the drummer **Kenny Washington**, Charlap displays the poise and taste, and, increasingly, the inner depth, of such grand stylists as Hank Jones and the late Tommy Flanagan. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—"Max Ernst: A Retrospective." Opens April 7. ♦ "Diane Arbus: Revelations," an indeed revealing (though gratingly worshipful) retrospective, confirms Arbus's achievement as a revolutionary photographer. Through May 30. ♦ What is beguiling and perhaps surprising in "Cameo Appearances," an assortment of small carved-stone items drawn from the Met's world-class collection, is the exactitude of the likenesses—one realizes afresh why such rings, brooches, and miniatures would have been treasured as portraits and traded as keepsakes. With examples dating from the Roman empire through the Renaissance (a sleeping shepherdess with her flock) and on to the nineteenth century (Admiral Nelson in beaky profile), this lapidary little show also explains the difference between cameos (raised reliefs) and intaglios (incised engravings). Through Jan. 26. ♦ Duccio's "Madonna and Child," circa 1300, a triumphant recent acquisition for the Met. Through May 15. ♦ "From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master." Through May 1. ♦ "The Kano School: Orthodoxy and Iconoclasm." Through June 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Thomas Demand." The German artist's crisp photographs of cut-and-glued, life-size mockups of unpeopled environments suggest that, like photographs, our assumptions about reality are paper thin. Through May 30. ♦ "Contemporary Voices: Works from the UBS Art Collection." Through April 25. ♦ "Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape" surveys contemporary landscape design with elaborate architectural models, virtual tours, video, and photographs. Through May 16. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—"The Eye of the Storm: Works in Situ by Daniel Buren" is an "intervention"—that is, an exhibition tampering with the norms of exhibition—that fills Frank Lloyd Wright's atrium but does not improve it. An enclosed quadrant of the space, mirror clad, rises from floor to skylight. There are patches of color in the skylight (pretty) and along the ramp (boring). Passing inside the quadrant is the best part: it's darkish in there, and the hugely complex support armature feels menacing. The question of whom this arrogant show is for, and why, is more interesting than an experience that may stir nostalgia for the straightforward pomp and silliness of "The Gates." Through June 8. ♦ "The Hugo Boss Prize 2004: Rirkrit Tiravanija." The artist has built a small, narrow-cast television station inside the museum. Through May 11. ♦ Slater Bradley's "Doppelgänger Trilogy." Through May 22. ♦ The museum is surveying twentieth-century innovation in painting with three exhibitions of work drawn from the permanent collection: "School of Paris," through May 3, and "Expressionism" and "Paul Klee," both through May 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—"Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper." Through May 8. ♦ "Tim Hawkinson," a mid-career retrospective of the California artist's diverse inventions, including the football-field-size "Überorgan," an automated bagpipe housed in the sculpture garden at 590 Madison Avenue, at Fifty-seventh Street. Through May 29. ♦ "Ellen Gallagher: DeLuxe," a series of embellished images based on advertisements from mid-century African-American magazines. Through May 15. ♦ "Set Up: Recent Acquisitions in Photography." Through June 26. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—“Basquiat” is an important, intensely enjoyable retrospective of the neo-expressionist, who died in 1988, at the age of twenty-seven. Jean-Michel Basquiat turns out to be the essential American painter of the early eighties, who brought lyrical truth to a largely facetious revival of showily subjective modern styles. He did his best work in an early rush, in 1982: paintings of furious and hilarious masked heads, strewn with verbal and visual quotations from many sources. Room after room, the viewer rafts a stream of consciousness so acute as to suggest Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway,” jazzified. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—The British collection “Renaissance and Baroque Bronzes from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge” arrives for its first American tour with thirty-six small statues, by mostly little-known French, Dutch, German, and Italian artists, dating from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Through April 24. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—“Surrealism U.S.A.” is a superb roundup of paintings and sculptures from the nineteen-thirties and forties surveying modernism’s version of punk. Through May 8. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—“Greater New York 2005,” a co-production with the Museum of Modern Art, collects more than a hundred and sixty artists from around the city who have emerged in the last five years. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

BRUCE MCCALL

McCall, a frequent contributor to this magazine, makes impeccably detailed paintings that combine the relentless optimism of the American dream in the nineteen-forties and fifties with laugh-inducing surrealism. He imagines New York City, already wondrous, as a place where one might ice-fish in the Rockefeller rink or buy caviar and live octopus at the corner deli—neither of which looks impossible in his brightly deadpan renderings. Opens April 5. (James Goodman, 41 E. 57th St. 212-593-3737.)

JOEL SHAPIRO

Shapiro’s current show is like a walk through the artist’s atelier, packed with objects in various states of completion; even some of the “finished” work looks semi-constructed, as if the ideas were still being hashed out. Rough blocks of wood held together with wire and painted with bright, dripping color are the major motif. The multicolored “Study (20 Elements)” (2004) is a model for a work that will be on view this month in the Musée d’Orsay, in Paris. All told, a surprising number of ideas shoehorned into a modest-sized space. Through April 16. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)

UNICA ZÜRN

Surrealism stretched well into the nineteen-sixties for Zürn, who died in 1970, after a long cohabitation with the German artist Hans Bellmer (famed for his unsettling photographs of papier-mâché dolls). Her ink-on-paper drawings—which have uncanny affinities with those produced by today’s young doodle-obsessed artists—feature snakelike figures and fantastic, fossilized forms culled, theoretically, from the depths of her unconscious through

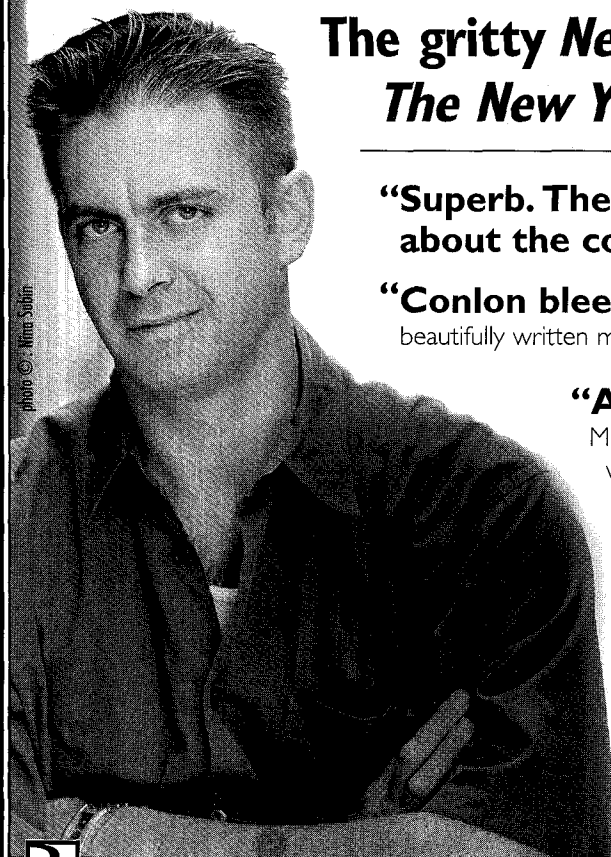
automatic drawing. They hover on the page, unburdened by horizon lines or academic notions of composition. Zürn’s deteriorating mental health during this period and ultimate suicide by defenestration further add to the sense of these works as sad, failed forms of art therapy. Through April 16. (Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA**DAVID CLAERBOUT**

Claerbout gives extra meaning to the term “moving pictures.” One single-channel video starts with an old black-and-white photo, to which the artist added contemporary footage (filmed at the same site) of a tree’s moving leaves and branches. The effect is a stunning contrast of motion and stillness (and, ultimately, life and death). The achingly lush “Bordeaux Piece” is a thirteen-hour-long video set in the French countryside accompanied by the sound of birds and insects and occasional dialogue. Its length makes following the narrative virtually impossible, but it has a warming charm amid the dull concrete and steel of Chelsea. Through April 16. (Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

RACHEL FEINSTEIN

The sculptures recede a bit in Feinstein’s new show, overshadowed by the pastels and paintings-on-mirror of elderly coquettes that line the walls. Dressed in corsets, powdered wigs, and pearls, the aged beauties pose with parasols, teacups, and phallic fawns, like Fragonard subjects captured a half-century on. The ladies look canny, regal, and tougher than you. One of the sculptures, a large white form in polyurethane foam, echoes the paintings, and it is perhaps this affinity, combined with the dramatic lighting that casts its shadow into an alcove, that makes this the most engaging of the three-dimensional items. Through April 23. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9889.)



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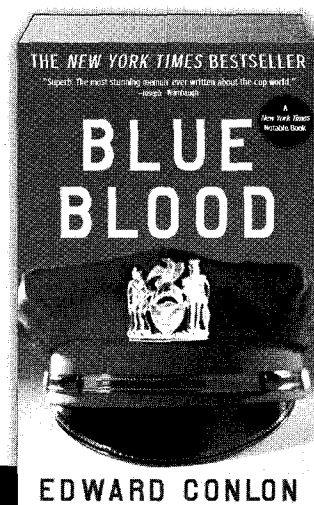
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SOWON KWON

In the central piece here, videos of Nadia Comaneci's and Nelli Kim's perfect performances at the 1976 Olympics are overlaid with animated outlines based on statistically "average" female bodies. The squiggly silhouettes also appear in two works that reference pinup calendar girls and iconic Martha Rosler and Joan Jonas videos. Kwon's work makes knowing reference to earlier feminist ideas, but unfortunately the most exciting aspect of this show is the underlying video of two exceptional young women reeling off handsprings, twists, and flips. Through April 16. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

GALLERIES-BROOKLYN**CADENCE GIERSBACH**

Giersbach's paintings are set at Niagara Falls, and the trace of Hudson River School wistfulness and grandeur that moves through them is only intensified by her jaundiced neon palette and her decision to place power towers and electrical wires on a par with the Horseshoe Falls and the Maid of the Mist. Under the turquoise-and-hot-pink sunsets, in the churning lime-and-teal waters, Giersbach does actually seem to be contem-

PHOTOGRAPHY**LARRY CLARK**

This retrospective covers a lot of ground, much of it more than once. Beginning with his first book, "Tulsa," published in 1971—in which he chronicled intimately, in black-and-white, the lives of his hometown friends—Clark has focussed on kids: adolescents shooting up, fondling guns, and looking ready for a car wreck. In "Teenage Lust," from 1983, Clark spliced his autobiography (using family photos, text, newspaper clippings, and court records)



"Fort Lauderdale, Florida, March 13, 1978," by Stephen Shore, at Houk.

MAGNUS VON PLESSEN

You can't paint abstractly and figuratively at the same time, but von Plessen gives it a good shot. Figures painted against blue-green grounds are partially obscured by straight, flat strokes of drab color that look almost like bandages; the wonderfully titled "Self-Portrait with Someone Else's Head" is finished by a series of vertical brushstrokes that suggest a scrim of venetian blinds. It's a restrained, but auspicious, U.S. debut for an artist already known in Europe. Through April 23. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

Short List**ERIC FISCHL**

Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Through April 23.

DAMIEN HIRST

Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through April 23.

plating nature, albeit a nature filtered through so many layers of pollution and tacky postcards that Frederic Church would never recognize it. Through April 9. (Roebeling Hall, 390 Wythe Ave. 718-599-5352.)

JIM TOROK / MARILLA PALMER

"Everything is great!" carols the block-capital legend in one of Torok's cartoon/word paintings. Beneath this oppressively optimistic caption, the head of Torok's signature loop-nosed, bald, and googly-eyed character floats unmoored, and the fine print reads "(see other side for details)." Musing at length on such subjects as "Questions for God" and the nature of the Republican Party, Torok's panels are slyly dense in narrative and sucker-punch funny in their graphic skill. Also on view are delicate constructions by Palmer, which improbably but successfully amalgamate light-emitting diodes and bits of forest fungus. Through April 18. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

with images of teen-agers hot to trot. An updated version of the material appeared in the 1995 movie "Kids," represented here by big color stills of skateboarders in Washington Square Park. A group of collages show Clark making the transition from still photography to movies, packing motion into a frame. Through June 5. (International Center of Photography, 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 212-857-0000.)

ANETA GRZESZYKOWSKA AND JAN SMAGA

For devotees of online real-estate listings with schematic floor plans and three-hundred-and-sixty-degree virtual tours, this show will be pure manna. The two young Polish artists take hundreds of pictures of lived-in apartments, all from above, then seamlessly reconfigure the shots into an aerial map of the subjects' lives. In the finished pieces, we see what's on the stove, who's in the bathtub, and who doesn't put away the dishes. Is it only a lack of space that compels someone to place a grand piano at the foot of the bed, or does it belong to a manic composer prone to bouts of sleeplessness? These reality

dioramas are clever studies of domesticity done with ingenious use of digital technology. Through April 23. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600.)

BRIAN MCKEE

These highly suggestive color prints of architectural ruins are so big and their elements so enticing that they make you want to go there. The Islamic arches, light pouring down stone stairs, abandoned niches, vaulted ceilings patterned in seven-pointed stars, Pompeian reds, and wine-dark blues are detached from any geographical context. This is the first solo U.S. exhibition by the twenty-seven-year-old photographer, who lives in Brooklyn and Vienna and who uses a nineteen-fifties eight-by-ten box camera and natural light. He gives no clue as to the location of his sacred precincts; the series, titled "Urbanus," is meant to evoke lost civilizations. Through April 9. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400.)

MARTINA MULLANEY

A white box of tissues sits on a rumpled white bedsheet close against a bare white wall in one of Mullaney's large color prints taken in homeless shelters and hostels in the U.K. These lonely pictures fuse a hardboiled documentary sensibility with an aesthetic finesse that constantly threatens to undermine the work. How can something so ugly—a soiled mattress, cracked plaster—be forced into an image that is so pretty? By leaving the people out of the frame and

concentrating on the rumpled sheets and dirty blankets used day after day by who knows who, Mullaney avoids simply exploiting pathos. The wan greens or pinks of the walls are cut off by striped ticking or orange waffle-weave blankets two-thirds of the way down the images, all of which is unassailably beautiful and makes for a strong U.S. debut. Through April 30. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

STEPHEN SHORE

In the nineteen-seventies, along with William Eggleston, Shore elevated color film to the realm of artistry. The youngest photographer to have his work collected by MOMA—he was only fourteen then, in 1961—Shore spent the years between 1973 and 1978 taking photographs throughout the U.S. and Canada, calling the resulting series "Uncommon Places." Shot with an eight-by-ten view camera, which requires a long exposure, the rural and urban landscapes, interiors, and portraits at first appear to be banal shots of ugly places. But the care Shore took in composing the shots, his camera's capacity to record minute detail, and the lost color palette of the seventies make for an invaluable historic record as well as a true artist's most influential work—just ask Andreas Gursky. Through April 16. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070.)

Short List

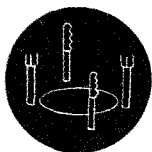
DAVID LA CHAPELLE

Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through April 16.

ANGELA STRASSHEIM

Marvelli, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-3363. Through April 30.

TABLES FOR TWO



TONY LUKE'S

576 Ninth Ave. (212-967-3055)—Funny that, of all the regional cuisines to migrate to New York, the last should be that of South Philadelphia, where the cheesesteak is king—and not just king, but a large and unruly monarch. This is obstinately so at Tony Luke's, near the Port Authority Bus Terminal. The cheesesteaks here are about a foot long, and they are served without the benefit of being cut in half. As a result, as you eat one, the structural integrity starts to go; well-cheesified clumps of steak ooze out the sides. Quick flanking bites along the roll's perimeter don't much help, and soon you find yourself pushing the thing into your mouth like a log into a chipper. In the brief period between the beginning and the end of this process, and in the moments immediately afterward, as you decimate a stack of napkins, you may conclude that there has never been a better sandwich, and you will pine for another. This is where the cheese fries come in.

In Philly, Tony Luke's has several outlets. The one here is a franchise, opened by Evan Stein, a Villanova native who spent two months last year living with Luke himself and apprenticing in the flagship stall, on East Oregon Avenue. Every ingredient is the same, down to the moderately tough rolls and the Liberty Bell deli paper. Stein even emulated the take-out setup: yellow fluorescent light, stool-and-counter layout, concrete floors resembling a sidewalk. Occasionally, there are authentic customers, too: expats in Eagles caps demanding hoagies "wit" (as in with onions) and wondering when Stein is going to start serving "breffis" (April 1).

As for the cheesesteak particulars: at Tony Luke's they don't chop the meat. They sort of slice and scramble it. And they are not dogmatic about Cheez Whiz; you can go for finer stuff without shame. The irony is that the signature sandwich here isn't the cheesesteak but the roast-pork Italian, a marvellous concoction of spicy roasted pork, sharp provolone, and broccoli rabe. The hint of bitterness is so peculiar that you can be excused, as you stuff it in lengthwise, for thinking that it is good for yiz. (Open weekdays for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, Saturdays for lunch and dinner, and Sundays from noon to 6. Sandwiches \$4.90-\$7.35.)

—Nick Paumgarten

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S

April 9 at 10 A.M. and 2: This sale of wines features an array of California wines focussing on the 1994 vintage, such as a lot of reds from the renowned Harlan Estate in the Napa Valley (which is expected to bring more than five thousand dollars). The auction also inaugurates a series of presale tastings and luncheons, this one prepared by Thomas Keller of Per Se and French Laundry. ♦ April 12 at 10 A.M., 2, and 5: An extensive sale of jewelry features gemstones treasured by everyone from the health guru Lucille Roberts—a suite of antique diamond jewelry estimated at half a million dollars—to Dali, who experimented with jewels in the late nineteen-thirties (represented here by a suite of peridot, diamond, and gold jewelry). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

DOYLE

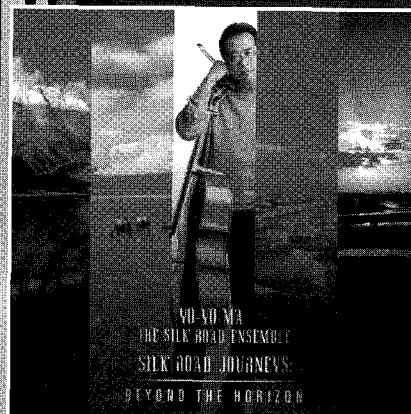
April 6 at 10 A.M.: The house, helping to demolish the millennial myth of the paperless office, offers the Alfred Cossidente collection of fine pens, some five hundred and fifty pens and mechanical pencils (by such makers as Parker and Waterman) that document the technological advances in the penman's art from the late nineteenth century to the postwar era. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-4141.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

April 6, April 9, and April 12 at 8: Gerald Finley and Samuel Ramey lead the cast in a magnificent revival of "Don Giovanni," as the Don and his manservant, Leporello; Tamar Iveri and Adina Nutescu are Donna Anna and Donna Elvira. Also with Isabel Bayrakdarian, Richard Croft, Jonathan Lemalu, and Kurt Moll; Philippe Jordan, the conductor, has a powerfully symphonic conception of the score. ♦ April 7 and April 11 at 8: Deborah Voigt, going from strength to strength this season, takes the role of Amelia in a revival of "Un Ballo in Maschera," joining Lyubov Petrova, Marianne Cornetti, Marcello Giordani, and Carlos Alvarez; James Conlon. ♦ April 8 at 8: Julie Taymor's popular production of "Die Zauberflöte" returns for a brief spring run, with some new cast members, in-

AN UNPRECEDENTED MUSICAL JOURNEY CONTINUES.



Yo-Yo Ma The Silk Road Ensemble Silk Road Journeys: BEYOND THE HORIZON

Renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma continues his exploration of the rich cultural traditions along the Silk Road—the historic link between East and West—uniting many different musical styles along the way.

His latest CD showcases a diverse group of composers and musicians including Iranian Kamancheh virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor, Azerbaijani vocalist Alim Qasimov, Indian tabla artist Sandeep Das and Wu Tong, master of the ancient Chinese instrument the xun and others.

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cluding Lisa Milne (as Pamina, in her Met debut), René Pape, and Matthias Goerne. Also with Erika Miklósa, Matthew Polenzani, and Kurt Moll; James Levine. ♦ April 9 at 1:30: The return of Salvatore Licitra, the next Pavarotti-replacement candidate, in the role of Cavaradossi may bring this revival of "Tosca" the most buzz, but the performances of Maria Guleghina, an agile veteran in the title role, and Mark Delavan, a confident new Scarpia, are more satisfying; James Conlon conducts, always con brio. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

April 7 at 7:30: Handel's "Orlando," featuring the sopranos Jennifer Aylmer and Amy Burton and the countertenor Bejun Mehta; Antony Walker conducts. ♦ April 8 at 8: The Glimmerglass production of "La Fanciulla del West" comes downstate with Stephanie Friede, Renzo Zulian, and Stephen Keckhulius in the leading roles; George Manahan. ♦ April 9 at 1:30: "Carmen," with Melanie Vaccari, Katharine Goeldner, John Bellemer, and Malcolm MacKenzie; Gary Thor Wedow. ♦ April 9 at 8: "Madama Butterfly," with Jee Hyun Kim, Kathryn Friest, Marc Heller, and Michael Corvino; Atsushi Yamada. ♦ April 10 at 1:30 and April 12 at 7:30: A new production of Bizet's "Les Pêcheurs de Perles," with Mary Dunleavy, Yeghishe Manucharyan, Stephen Powell, and Brian MacIntosh; Emmanuel Plasson, in his debut, conducts. (New York State Theatre. 212-307-4100.)

DICAPPO OPERA: "LA TRAVIATA"

New York's third professional opera company, housed in a superb modern theatre, presents Verdi's most affecting opera in a production directed by Michael Capasso; Pacien Mazzagatti conducts. (Dicapop Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438. April 8-9 at 8 and April 10 at 4.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK: "MIGNON"

Ambroise Thomas's once popular Romantic vehicle, a very Gallic treatment of Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister," is revived by Eve Queler's stalwart company. Stephanie Blythe takes the title role, joining John Relyea, Kate Aldrich, Eglise Gutierrez, and Massimo Giordano. (Carnegie Hall. 212-799-1982. April 7 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Two artists of exceptional refinement—the conductor Christoph von Dohnányi and the pianist Mitsuko Uchida—are featured on the Philharmonic's fourth "Visions of the Beyond" concert, which includes not only Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 but also evocative works by Ligeti ("Atmosphères"), Sibelius ("The Swan of Tuonela"), and Janáček. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. April 7 at 7:30 and April 8-9 at 8.)

KIROV ORCHESTRA

Valery Gergiev conducts Mahler's Symphony No. 2, "Resurrection," a fitting close to the orchestra's trio of Carnegie Hall concerts. The soprano Irina Matyeva and the mezzo-soprano Olga Borodina are joined by the Riverside Choral Society and—in a nice touch—the Russian Chamber Chorus of New York. (212-247-7800. April 6 at 8.)

THE SIXTEEN

Harry Christophers' noted a cappella chorus combines the unaffected elegance of the English choral tradition with a rich and buzzing sound. Their latest concert is devoted to music by a renowned trio of British composers—Taverner, Tallis, and Tippett. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-211-6500. April 6 at 8.)

DALLAS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Andrew Litton brings his robust orchestra (and the Dallas Symphony Chorus) to Carnegie Hall with a crowd-pleasing touring program: Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra" and Orff's "Carmina Burana." Heidi Grant Murphy, Andrew Skoog, and Richard Zeller are the vocal soloists. (212-247-7800. April 8 at 8.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Uncommonly graceful works by Mozart (the Symphony No. 29 in A Major), Haydn, and Barber ("Knoxville: Summer of 1915") precede the world premiere of a new version of John Adams's Chamber Symphony on the conductorless ensemble's latest

program. The soprano Barbara Bonney is their guest. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 9 at 8.)

TALLIS SCHOLARS

The renowned English choral group, advocates of a pure and refined style, sing music by Josquin and Gombert in the nave of Riverside Church. (Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-854-7799. April 9 at 8.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

Charles Dutoit conducts Fauré's "Pelleas and Melisande" Suite, the New York premiere of James MacMillan's Symphony No. 3 ("Silence"), and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major (with the redoubtable Martha Argerich). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 12 at 8.)



Trio Medieval performs at Merkin Concert Hall on April 7.

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Bruce Adolphe, the society's artistic and educational adviser, gets his due with an evening of his works (including the premiere of "Songs of Life and Love") performed by the mezzo-soprano Mary Nessinger, the pianist Marija Stroke, and others. (Rose Studio, Rose Building. 212-875-5788. April 7 at 6:45.)

ZANKEL HALL RECITALS

April 7: The Canadian pianist Angela Hewitt—known, like her countryman Glenn Gould, for her Bach—offers the "French Overture" in B Minor and the "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue" on a program that also includes works by Couperin and Ravel. ♦ April 9: The Brentano String Quartet, avatars of American modernism, perform music by Beethoven (the Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132), Schoenberg (the Quartet No. 2 in F-Sharp Minor, with the soprano Elizabeth Keusch), and Bruce Adolphe. ♦ April 10: In "Making Music: Michael Tilson Thomas," a crew of excellent young artists performs world-premiere works by the American composer-

conductor (including "Rilke Songs" and "Notturno"). (212-247-7800. All concerts begin at 7:30.)

MILLER THEATRE: AUGUSTA READ THOMAS George Steel's "Composer Portrait" series salutes the brilliant Chicago modernist, with a selection of her works performed by the crack new-music ensemble Alarm Will Sound. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. April 7 at 8.)

TRIO MEDIEVAL

Three Norwegian women—hyped as early music's next superstars—sing an adventurous program of traditional and contemporary works (by such composers as Gavin Bryars). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 7 at 8.)

PACO PENÁ

An evening of flamenco music, performed by the superb Andalusian guitarist. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 9 at 8.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

April 9 at 8: Olga Borodina, the eloquent Russian mezzo-soprano, sings songs by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff in a venue equal to her artistry. (Temple of Dendur.) ♦ April 11 at 8: "Celebrating Jordi Savall," a three-concert festival honoring one of early music's most compelling talents, begins with "Folias and Romanescas," a program featuring the chi-rosco colors of his ensemble Hesperion XXI, with Savall on gamba. (Medieval Sculpture Hall.) (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949.)

YO-YO MA AND THE SILK ROAD ENSEMBLE

The cellist and his band of all-stars (including the violinist Colin Jacobsen, the percussionist Joseph Gramley, and the fabulous pi-pa player Wu Man) reunite for a program of folk and concert music from China and Central Asia. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 10 at 8.)

EVGENY KISSIN

The dynamic Russian pianist offers a bouquet of Chopin Fantasies and Impromptus along with music by Medtner and Stravinsky (the "Three Movements from 'Petrushka'"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 11 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS

April 6 at 7: Dana Goodyear, an editor at this magazine, reads from her new collection of poems, "Honey and Junk." (McNally Robinson Booksellers, 50 Prince St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ April 7 at 7:30: The poet Glyn Maxwell, the actor Maria Tucci, and practiced readers of Middle English present selections from Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," with music. (Rubin Museum of Art, 150 W. 17th St. For reservations, call 212-620-5000, ext. 344.) ♦ April 8 at 6: A night of improvised rants, humorous political poetry, and choreopoetry (which incorporates poetry, dance, and music) with Taylor Mead, Rick Shapiro, Ntozake Shange (appearing with the musicians Kahil El'Zabar, Craig Harris, and Olu Dara), and others. (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery. 212-614-0505.) ♦ April 9 at 6: Readings by members of the Italian American Writers' Association, plus an open mic. (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319.)

TALKS

April 6 at 7:30: The *New Yorker* cartoonist David Sipress interviews his colleague Sam Gross. (Dixon Place at the Marquee Theatre, 356 Bowery. For reservations, call 212-219-0736, ext. 106.) ♦ April 7 at 7: Jeff Tweedy, the guitarist and front man for the band Wilco, and the Stanford Law School professor Lawrence Lessig discuss Napster and the arts. Steve Johnson, the author of "Interface Technology," will moderate the discussion. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-868-4444.) ♦ April 7 at 12:30: The rock-music and culture critic Greil Marcus discusses "Like a Rolling Stone," his new monograph about Bob Dylan's most famous and influential song. (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 212-601-1000.) ♦ April 11 at 6: Robert Sullivan talks about the year he spent wearing night-vision goggles and studying the denizens of New York alleys. He put his discoveries into his latest book, "Rats: Observations on the History and Habitat of the City's Most Unwanted Inhabitants." (Coliseum Books, 11 W. 42nd St. No tickets necessary.)

MOVIES OPENING

DAVID HOCKNEY:

THE COLORS OF MUSIC

A documentary about the artist's opera designs. Opening April 6. (Film Forum.)

EROS

A three-part anthology film about love and sexuality by Wong Kar-wai, Steven Soderbergh, and Michelangelo Antonioni. Opening April 8. (Sunshine Cinema.)

FEVER PITCH

The Farrelly brothers recast Nick Hornby's book in the Red Sox universe. With Drew Barrymore and Jimmy Fallon. Opening April 8.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

A romantic comedy written and directed by Yvan Attal ("My Wife Is an Actress"), who also stars. With Charlotte Gainsbourg. In French. Opening April 8. (Paris.)

A HOLE IN MY HEART

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 8. (Cinema Village.)

KUNG FU HUSTLE

A martial-arts comedy from Stephen Chow ("Shaolin Soccer"), who wrote, directed, and stars. In Cantonese and Mandarin (see This Week). Opening April 8. (Empire 25 and Union Square.)

PRIMO AMORE

Matteo Garrone's drama about an obsessive love affair. In Italian. Opening April 6. (Quad Cinema.)

SAHARA

Matthew McConaughey, Penélope Cruz, and Steve Zahn star in an adaptation of a Clive Cussler novel. Opening April 8.

VOICES IN WARTIME

A documentary about veterans and the psychological impact of war. Directed by Rick King. Opening April 8. (Metro Twin and Sunshine Cinema.)

WINTER SOLSTICE

Josh Sternfeld directed this independent drama about a family coping with death. With Allison Janney and Anthony LaPaglia. Opening April 8. (Angelika Film Center and 62nd & Broadway.)

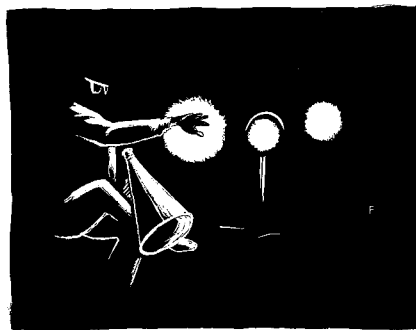
FILM NOTES

THE BALLAD OF JACK & ROSE

Naïvely bad. Daniel Day-Lewis, gaunt, pale, and wearing an awful little hat, plays an aging, arrogant counterculture environmentalist living on an island in 1986 in perfect harmony with his teen-age daughter (Camilla Belle). He brings his mainland girlfriend (Catherine Keener) and her two sons into the house, and everything goes haywire. There are stupid quarrels, a loaded gun that goes off, a snake that comes out from under the bed when two of the kids fornicate. Everything is shot so close in that you can't actually see the actors half the time. Nothing that the hero does makes much sense—the movie seems to be an exposure of his futility. This awkwardly stupid mess was written and directed by Rebecca Miller, who is Day-Lewis's wife; Miller seems to have plugged all too successfully into the actor's self-mortifying side. With Beau Bridges as a real-estate developer.—*David Denby* (Empire 25, First & 62nd Street Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Sunshine Cinema.)

BORN INTO BROTHELS

Watching Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman's prize-winning documentary, shot in Calcutta's Sonagachi red-light district, where Briski lived, on and off, for years, one is initially held by the sensuousness of the colors and the beauty of the children—the off-spring of prostitutes, eight, nine, twelve years old, who are growing up in the district and are surely heading into prostitution themselves. Then the "plot" of the movie kicks in. Briski gives the children cameras and teaches them to take pictures of their surroundings; they gain a sense of themselves, and they master a craft. But will Briski be able to get them out of the brothels (where their parents need them for economic reasons) and into decent schools? One is aware of Briski as a rather aggressive guardian angel from the West, who comes in



and tries to save only a few children, but she's hardheaded and effective, and her quest makes sense.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Metro Twin, and Village East Cinemas.)

BRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Ridiculous, but immensely enjoyable. Jane Austen's most enduringly popular story done as a Bollywood musical comedy, with Martin Henderson as Darcy, a callow American millionaire, and the ravishing Aishwarya Rai as the smartly alert Elizabeth Bennet figure, known here as Lalita, one of four highly nubile daughters living in Amritsar. The ballroom scene is turned into a sprightly Bollywood production number; in the street bazaars, cross-dressers and goofy guys with turbans break into dance. It's a travesty, of course, but also an exuberant, amiable movie, and it won't corrupt you or Jane Austen. Directed by Gurinder Chadha.—*D.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, and Union Square.)

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

This Stanley Kubrick film from 1971 might be the work of a strict and exacting German professor who set out to make a porno-violent sci-fi comedy. The movie is adapted from Anthony Burgess's 1962 novel, which is set in a vaguely socialist future populated by roving gangs of teen-age thugs. The protagonist, Alex (Malcolm McDowell), is the leader of one of these gangs; he's a conscienceless schoolboy sadist who enjoys stealing, stomping, raping, and destroying, until he kills a woman and is sent to prison. There he is conditioned into a moral robot who becomes nauseated by thoughts of sex and violence. Burgess wrote an ironic fable about a future in which men lose their capacity for moral choice. Kubrick, however, gives us an Alex who is more alive than anybody else in the movie, and younger and more attractive, and McDowell plays him exuberantly, with power and slyness. So at the end, when Alex's bold, aggressive, punk's nature is restored to him, it seems not a joke on all of us (as it does in the book) but, rather, a victory in which we share, and Kubrick takes an exultant tone. Along the way, Alex has been set apart as the hero by making his victims less human than he; the picture plays with violence in an intellectually seductive way—Alex's victims are twisted and incapable of suffering. Kubrick pours on the hearts and flowers; what is done to Alex is far worse than what Alex has done, so society itself can be felt to justify Alex's hoodlumism. Score by Walter Carlos.—*Pauline Kael* (Sunshine Cinema; April 8-9.)

DOWNFALL

The great Swiss-German actor Bruno Ganz gives a staggering performance as Adolf Hitler in this full-scale realist German production detailing the last ten days of the Third Reich. As the Red Army rampages through Berlin, Hitler and his staff have retreated to the bunker under the Reich Chancellery. They are all here—Himmler, Goebbels, Speer—the entire fascinating, loathsome crew of commanders, mad visionaries, and toadies (all brilliantly acted)—and, leading them still, a man so physically ill and constricted in movement that he looks like a broken-down puppet from a Bavarian travelling circus. The puppet comes to life, of course, in appalling self-pitying rants that are borderline funny. The entire movie teeters on the edge of sick comedy—in particular such scenes as the deaths of the Goebbels children, one by one, at the hands of their mother—and at times one longs for a coldly malicious ironist

like Brecht or Fassbinder to come in and take over. Produced and written by Bernd Eichinger; directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. In German.—*D.D.* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/14 & 21/05.) (Film Forum.)

GUESS WHO

Any similarity between this movie and "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" is strictly coincidental. Ashton Kutcher plays a successful stockbroker who quits his job the day before he and his fiancée (Zoë Saldana) are scheduled to travel to the New Jersey suburbs to meet her parents (Bernie Mac and Judith Scott). The tired complications of the plot are knocked off without benefit of ingenuity, believability, insight—or laughs. If there's any emotional or intellectual juice left in the subjects of interracial marriage and liberal hypocrisy, it's not to be found here. This is a movie made in a boardroom, a merger of Bernie-Ashton demographics.—*Ken Marks* (Battery Park 11, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Magic Johnson Theatres, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

HITCH

In this modern screwball comedy, Will Smith exerts his considerable charm as a swift, super-knowing "date doctor" who advises men of less than extraordinary appearance how to woo the women of their dreams. Smith's principal student is a heavyset accountant, played by the TV-comedy actor Kevin James, who is light on his feet in the tradition of such buoyant heavies as Zero Mostel and Jackie Gleason and possibly just as talented as those two. The movie is too long for what it has to say, but much of it is good-hearted fun. Written by Kevin Bisch; directed by Andy Tennant.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

LA JETÉE

The documentary essayist Chris Marker made this seminal science-fiction short in 1962. It hasn't lost its potency, even for audiences familiar with coiling time-jump narratives or with nonfiction films made up almost entirely of stills. Marker's use of photographs to tell his story transcends purely informational moviemaking: his images suggest unfathomable mysteries of fate and desire. Living in subterranean quarters after a nuclear war, Marker's hero has fixated on the prewar memory of a woman at Orly Airport and a man who is shot while running toward her. The ruthless scientists of the postapocalyptic future believe that memory can serve as a gateway to time travel. The protagonist proves them correct, first by connecting with the woman at the airport, then by jumping ahead to the future in order to secure a civilization-saving energy device. What complicates the outcome is that he falls in love. The performances within the stills, and Marker's uncanny compositional sense, provide nuances and implications that overflow each frame. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; April 9-10.)

LOOK AT ME

In this wonderful new film by the team of Agnès Jaoui (who acts, writes, and directs) and Jean-Pierre Bacri (who acts and writes), Bacri is a Parisian big-shot publisher and writer, and young Marilou Berri is his grievously overweight and unloved daughter, who can't get past a disco bouncer but attains something like happiness when she sings Handel and Mozart with her choral group. Around this aggravated father-daughter vacuum, Jaoui and Bacri assemble the elements of the Parisian publishing and music worlds, and their theme is egocentricity—the unconscious selfishness that cuts people off even from those they are closest to. Bacri's big cheese, a monster of self-centeredness, is the villain of the piece, but the condition is shown to be universal. A tender, indignant, but also very worldly movie.—*D.D.* (4/4/05) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

MAJOR DUNDEE

Size matters in Sam Peckinpah's studio-mangled cavalry movie from 1965, so the arrival of a new print that's perhaps a dozen minutes closer to the director's original vision is banner news for fans of Peckinpah, Westerns, and epic American cinema in general. It stars Charlton Heston as the Union

commandant of a New Mexico prison garrison, whose rebel inmates, led by Richard Harris, help him defeat a rampaging Apache chief. This picture has always demanded a big-screen presentation, because it has all the makings of a true Peckinpah odyssey—visual whoosh, romantic gestures, and scarred, overscaled antiheroes. Peckinpah deploys his troops like a visionary general: it's thrilling to see them make their mark on a land that's always on the verge of swallowing them up. Whether or not the new version fully corrects the wayward narrative or fleshes out the lead characters, the movie will always boast the spectacular wide-screen cinematography of Sam Leavitt and the push-pull chemistry of Heston at his most stoically magnetic and Harris at his most gallant and unpredictable. The wily supporting cast includes James Coburn, Ben Johnson, Warren Oates, Slim Pickens, Brock Peters, and L. Q. Jones. Script by Harry Julian Fink, Oscar Saul, and Peckinpah. Grover Crisp supervised the restoration; Christopher Caliendo wrote the new musical score (Peckinpah hated the original).—M.S. (Film Forum; April 8-12.)

MELINDA AND MELINDA

At dinner with friends in a Greenwich Village restaurant, two playwrights, one tragic (Larry Pine), one comic (Wallace Shawn), offer alternate versions of the same story: Melinda (Radha Mitchell), a distraught young woman, shows up, unannounced, at a dinner party held by old friends and intrudes upon their lives. The dramatic framework of Woody Allen's new movie is ambitious, but an odd sort of indifference or blindness seems to have overcome him during production. Mitchell is surrounded by different actors in each version, but it's surprisingly hard to tell the two stories apart. The general atmosphere of both stories and even some of the characters are very similar: both are set in Woodyland, that familiar elegant fantasy version of Manhattan, impeccably furnished, with no brightness, no neon, no pop culture anywhere, and the characters are largely a nattering, trivial, shallowly self-serving bunch. Mitchell is a fine young actress, but Allen pushes her so far into the fidgets that one rather dreads her next appearance. One leaves with such sour thoughts as, The inability to pull oneself together is neither tragic nor comic; it's just a waste of energy. With Will Ferrell, Amanda Peet, Jonny Lee Miller, and Chloë Sevigny.—D.D. (3/21/05) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.)

MILLIONS

In a surprisingly sunny suburb of Manchester, two motherless little boys—one pious and generous (Alex Etel), the other enterprising and manipulative (Lewis McGibbon)—gain control of a Nike bag filled with cash after thieves throw it off a moving train. Will the secretive boys invest the money, give it to the poor, spend it on video games? And when will the nasty blackguards who stole the money show up, eager to recover the swag? "Millions," written by Frank Cottrell Boyce and directed by Danny Boyle, should have had the enchantment of "Empire of the Sun" or the recent Italian film "I'm Not Scared" or a dozen other child-centered stories and movies, but Boyle can't stop showing off his virtuosity. He changes camera speeds, zips through sequences, sends things flying through the air. We're supposed to be overwhelmed by magic, but what we see is fancy film technique and a lot of overstrained whimsy. To use special effects without coming off as glib, you may have to be a boy at heart yourself.—D.D. (3/21/05) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

MY FAVORITE YEAR

The year is 1954, when Sid Caesar was the king of live TV comedy, and this movie is a fictional treatment of life backstage during the days when many soon to be famous writers worked on his shows, brainstorming together. As the brawny, truculent King Kaiser, Joe Bologna suggests an introverted ox, and Peter O'Toole is King's guest star from Hollywood—the notorious womanizing boozier Alan Swann, who is part John Barrymore and part Errol Flynn. Bologna has an authentic boss-comic

aura, and O'Toole is simply astounding. Ravaged and liquefied as Swann is, he still has his feelers out—he's always aware of the impression he's making; even when Swann is drunk, he's acting a great actor drunk. This show-business farce is the first film directed by Richard Benjamin, and it's a creaky job of moviemaking, but it has a bubbling spirit; Benjamin is crazy about actors—not a bad start for a director. In the tricky role of the youngest of the gag writers, Mark Linn-Baker is button-eyed and skinny—a snookums; it's an inventive performance yet borderline ghastly. And Jessica Harper's scenes don't pan out. But over all it's a very funny picture. Released in 1982.—P.K. (BAM Rose Cinemas; April 10.)

OLDBOY

A man named Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-sik) is imprisoned in a room for fifteen years, not by the state but by the anonymous bearer of a grudge. On his release, he goes in search of revenge, with the aid of a fetching sushi chef. Upon this unusual plot, which manages to seem at once slender and wholly implausible, the South Korean director Park Chan-wook has constructed a highly wrought, low-lit piece of gothic, worrying away at our senses without pausing to check that his story makes any sense. Scenes branch off one from another in a gruelling phantasmagoria that is best approached in a spirit of bitter comedy, or after a few drinks; if you want to follow the progress of subcutaneous insects, or to see a man ingest a live octopus, then this is the movie for you. There is no doubting the finesse of the director's eye, or the calmness with which even his most savage sequences are composed, but the result feels unappealingly pleased with itself, trapped in its obligation to shock. As for the solution to the mystery, don't wait up. In Korean.—Anthony Lane (3/28/05) (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

PLAYTIME

Since the late nineteen-forties, Jacques Tati had been satirizing, with unsurpassed inventiveness, the inhuman allure of technological life and its American standards. For this 1967 film, he built a grandiose, gleaming glass-and-steel skyscraper city on the outskirts of Paris and conceived his comic crises in the details of its disproporitions. In the two zones of action (they hardly count as stories), Tati himself is Monsieur Hulot, a tall, spring-jointed, aging Everyman who goes to see a bureaucrat about a document, and a busload of American tourists blithely disembark in a Paris of landmarks seen only fleetingly as distant reflections in swinging glass doors. When, in the neon twilight, Hulot's weary glance crosses the windows of parallel buses to meet that of Barbara (Barbara Dennek), a fresh-scrubbed young American, the impossible romantic epiphany is worthy of Baudelaire. Emotions, identities, and even bodily functions are distorted by the mechanized uniformity; the comedy is despairing, and yet modulated. A grimly modern nightspot is trashed by an American tycoon's anarchic revelry—an alternative International Style—and in the wreckage Hulot and Barbara finally meet. In French, English, and German.—Richard Brody (Florence Gould Hall; April 12.)

THE RING TWO

A sequel to the horror hit of 2002, with Naomi Watts returning to the role—demanding, yet drab and oddly fruitless—of Rachel Keller, a single mother with a freaky son (David Dorfman). They have moved to a small town to get away from a long-haired ghost named Samara (Kelly Stables), who made their life hell in the previous movie and who now, needless to say, wastes no time whatsoever in rolling up to finish what she started. What you get for your money is a brace of decent shocks, a spray of special effects (look out for the upward-raining bathwater), and almost no sense of dread. This is a great shame, because the director is Hideo Nakata, who made the two original "Ringu" movies in Japan in the late nineteen-nineties, and whose command of atmosphere—invariably dark, moist, and clouded with premonition—seemed instinctive enough to survive a change of location. But something in the American project foils or escapes him, and the new work tends to plod where it should shiver and creep. With Sissy Spacek as the patient in a psychiatric institution who Tells Us What It All

Means.—A.L. (3/28/05) (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

SIN CITY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 11, Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Magic Johnson Theatres, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

STEAMBOY

The director Katsuhiro Ôtomo's first anime feature since "Akira" (1988). In that picture, the city in danger was a futuristic Tokyo; this time it's a futuristic nineteenth-century London. Ray, the title character, is a third-generation mechanical genius thrust into the middle of an adventure set in motion by the Steam Ball, a powerful invention of his grandfather's. It's an allegory about corporate greed, man's warlike nature, and the proper use of science, none of it very subtle. Ôtomo displays great imagination mixing the real mechanical marvels of 1866 with his own fantastical creations, and "Steamboy" is often inspiringly good-looking, offering panoramic views of London and high-velocity action, but the characters are as flat as their facial expressions. With the voices of Anna Paquin, Alfred Molina, and Patrick Stewart in the English-language version.—K.M. (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE UPSIDE OF ANGER

Joan Allen, lurching into rooms and then speaking with the weird explicitness of an alcoholic trying to maintain control, is Terry Wolfmeyer, a suburban housewife who has been abandoned by her husband; Kevin Costner is Denny Davis, a sheepish retired baseball player whose hand always clutches a beer bottle. She's overdefined; he's undefined; and in the gaps between Terry's faltering attempts to raise her four beautiful, cranky daughters, Terry and Denny have an occasional meeting in bed. This domestic comedy, written and directed by Mike Binder (who performs well as Denny's sleazebag friend), takes its time and establishes a natural rhythm of quarrels, reconciliations, and serious talk. As the rancorous Terry, who can't stop herself from telling people off, Allen blooms into a great angry comedienne. With Evan Rachel Wood, Erika Christensen, Keri Russell, and Alicia Witt as the fab Wolfmeyer girls.—D.D. (4/4/05) (Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

WALK ON WATER

Eyal (Lior Ashkenazi), a hard-bitten and sardonic Mossad agent whose job normally entails such things as assassinating Palestinian terrorists, gets assigned to two young Germans visiting Israel—Axel (Knut Berger) and Pia (Caroline Peters), a brother and sister whose flower-child tolerance infuriates Eyal. Yet he takes the assignment: the grandfather of these two is an unimaginably ancient Nazi war criminal living in Argentina, and the Mossad wants the old man dead. This gentle but ambitious Israeli film, directed by Eytan Fox and written by Gal Uchovsky, is a political thriller that turns into a moral fable. Axel, who is gay, and as openhearted as Eyal is embittered—Ashkenazi, who has the heavy lids and five-o'clock shadow of Clive Owen, is a suitably inexorable presence—pulls the agent out of his shell, and the movie, in Axel's spirit of reconciliation, tries to put an end to the Nazi era once and for all and also end the Israeli insistence on vengeance. In English, German, and Hebrew.—D.D. (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Metro Twin.)

ALSO PLAYING

BEAUTY SHOP

Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

KONTROLL

Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beckman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
(212-398-3939).

Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave.
(212-727-8110).

First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
(212-757-2280).

Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Magic Johnson Theatres, Frederick Douglass
Blvd. at 125th St.

Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St.
(212-330-8182).

34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

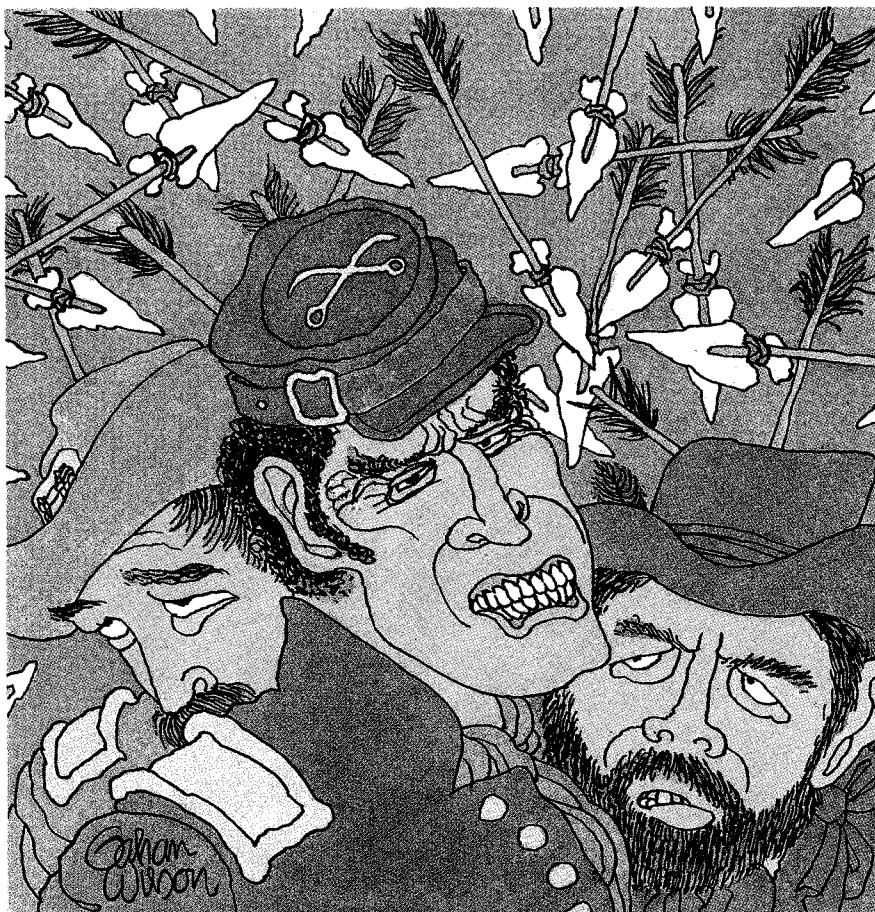
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—“Essential Cinema.” April 6 at 7:30: “Michael” (1924, Carl Theodor Dreyer; silent, with Danish intertitles). ♦ April 7 at 7 and 9: Short films by Joseph Cornell. ♦ “New Filmmakers.” April 6 at 8: “Blue in Green” (2005, Zak Forsman and M. David Melvin).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Through April 19: “Who’s Afraid of Mike Nichols?” April 8 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “The Birdcage” (1996). ♦ April 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “Catch-22” (1970). ♦ April 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “Heartburn” (1986). ♦ Through April 10: The Fifth Annual Brooklyn Jewish Film Festival. April 6 at 7 and April 7 at 4:30: “The Plot Against Harry” (1969, Michael Roemer). ♦ April 7 at 9:15: “Tomorrow We Move” (2003, Chantal Akerman; in French). ♦ April 9 at 7: “Lenny” (1974, Bob Fosse). ♦ April 9 at 9:30: “Mr. Saturday Night” (1992, Billy Crystal). ♦ April 10 at 2: “A Night at the Opera” (1935, Sam Wood). ♦ April 10 at 4:30: “My Favorite Year” (†). ♦ April 10 at 9: “Keeping the Faith” (2000, Edward Norton).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through April 6: “The Early Sturges: Preston Sturges Screenplays, 1930-1939.” April 6 at 1:30, 5:15, and 9: “Diamond Jim” (1935, Edward Sutherland). ♦ April 6 at 3:15 and 7: “If I Were King” (1938, Frank Lloyd). ♦ Restoration premières. April 7 at 2:45, 6, and 9:15: “The Letter” (1929, Jean de Limur). ♦ April 7 at 4 and 7: “The Scarlet Letter” (1926, Victor Sjöström). ♦ Special event. April 8-12 at 1:10, 4:30, and 8: “Major Dundee” (†).



Charlton Heston in an extended version of “Major Dundee,” at Film Forum.

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Special screening. April 9 at 12:30 and 4: “La Fausse Suivante” (2000, Benoît Jacquot; in French without subtitles). ♦ Through April 26: “Paris Series.” April 12 at 12:30 and 7: “Playtime” (†). ♦ April 12 at 4: “Stolen Kisses” (1968, François Truffaut; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—“112 Years of Cinema.” April 6 at 5:30: “The House of Mirth” (2000, Terence Davies). ♦ April 6 at 6: “The 400 Blows” (1959, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ April 6 at 8:15: “Regeneration” (1915, Raoul Walsh; silent). ♦ April 7 at 5:30: “The Spoilers” (1914, Colin Campbell; silent). ♦ April 7 at 6: “Real Women Have Curves” (2002, Patricia Cardoso). ♦ April 7 at 7:45: “Hoodoo Ann” (1916, Lloyd Ingraham; silent). ♦ April 8 at 6: “Brute Force” (1947, Jules Dassin). ♦ April 8 at 8:30: “Almanac of Fall” (1984, Béla Tarr; in Hungarian). ♦ Special screening. April 6 at 8: “Palindromes” (2005, Todd Solondz). ♦ “Friday Night at the Movies.” April 8 at 5: “Spellbound” (2002, Jeffrey Blitz). ♦ The films of Christopher Guest. April 8 at 8:30: “Best in Show” (2000). ♦ April 9 at 2: “Waiting for Guffman” (1996). ♦ April 10 at 5: “This Is Spinal Tap” (1984). ♦ April 11 at 6: “A Mighty Wind” (2003). ♦ April 11 at 8: “The Big Picture” (1989). ♦ “Hans Christian Andersen for Grown-Ups.” April 9 at 5:30: “The Match Factory Girl” (1990, Aki Kaurismäki; in Finnish). ♦ April 9 at 8: “The Little Match Girl” (1928, Jean Renoir; silent) and “Match Girl” (1966, Andrew Meyer). ♦ April 10 at 5: “Resurrection of the Little Match Girl” (2002, Sun-Woo Jang; in Korean).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Free senior matinees. April 6 at 10:30 A.M.: “Casablanca” (1942, Michael Curtiz). ♦ “Cinema Tropical.” April 8 at 7:30: “Beyond the Sea” (2003, Lisandro Pérez-Rey). ♦ Marx Brothers films. April 9 at 2: “The Cocoanuts” (1929, Joseph Santley and Robert Florey). ♦ April 9 at 4: “Duck Soup” (1933,

Leo McCarey). ♦ April 10 at 2: “Monkey Business” (1931, Norman Z. McLeod). ♦ April 10 at 4: “Horse Feathers” (1932, McLeod). ♦ Repertory nights. April 9-10 at 6:30: “Sans Soleil” (1982, Chris Marker; in French) and “La Jetée” (†).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. April 8-9: “A Clockwork Orange” (†).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—“Reel Rhythms: Music from the Islamic World.” April 12 at 7: “I’ll Sing for You” (2001, Jacques Sarasin; in French). ♦ April 12 at 8:30: “Festival in the Desert” (2004, Lionel Brouet; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through April 7: “New Faces of Swedish Cinema; Spotlight on Lukas Moodysson.” All films are in Swedish. April 7 at 2: “Kops” (2003, Josef Fares). ♦ April 7 at 4: “Lilya 4-Ever” (2002, Moodysson). ♦ April 7 at 9:20: “Together” (2000, Moodysson). ♦ Through April 19: “Pulling Strings: Violinists on Film.” April 9 at 2: Yehudi Menuhin, Jascha Heifetz, and David Oistrakh. ♦ April 10 at 2: Jascha Heifetz. ♦ April 12 at 6:30: “David Oistrakh, Artist of the People?” (1999, Bruno Monsiegeon). ♦ April 12 at 8:30: David Oistrakh. ♦ April 8-17: “Amitabh Bachchan: The Biggest Film Star in the World!” (1977, Manmohan Desai; in Hindi). ♦ April 8 at 7:45 and April 12 at 3:20: “Dev” (2004, Govind Nihalani; in Hindi). ♦ April 9 at 5: “Aks” (2001, Rakesh Mehra; in Hindi). ♦ April 9 at 8:30: “Khakee” (2004, Rajkumar Santosh; in Hindi and Urdu). ♦ April 10 at 5 and April 11 at 9:30: “Black” (2005, Sanjay Leela Bhansali; in Hindi and English). ♦ April 11 at 4:15: “Abhimaan” (1973, Hrishikesh Mukherjee; in Hindi). ♦ April 11 at 6:40: “Saudagar” (1973, Sudhendu Roy; in Hindi). ♦ April 12 at 1: “Anand” (1970, Mukherjee; in Hindi).

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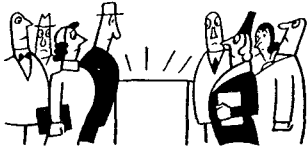


PORSCHE



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
JOHN PAUL II



Karol Wojtyla, a poet, actor, and playwright, who had been a bishop in Poland for twenty years, was elected Pope by the College of Cardinals on October 16, 1978. Shortly afterward, Yuri Andropov, the head of Soviet intelligence, called the K.G.B.'s station chief in Warsaw and asked furiously, "How could you have allowed a citizen of a Socialist country to be elected Pope?" The Warsaw *resident*, who, during his time in Poland, had developed a knowledge of at least the rudiments of Church procedure, reportedly told Andropov that he would do better to direct his inquiries to Rome.

Andropov's anxiety was existential and well founded. As a defender of the Soviet faith, Andropov had previously directed the expulsion of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn from Russia as a threat to the stability of the Union. Now he ordered the First Chief Directorate of the K.G.B. to analyze the potential of a new threat, who had given himself the name John Paul II. According to the Pope's biographer George Weigel, the hurried analysis by Soviet intelligence determined that Wojtyla's election had been backed by a German-American conspiracy led by, among others, Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national-security ad-

viser. Their goal, the document said, was nothing less than the undermining of the Communist regime in Poland and the ultimate disintegration of the Soviet Union and its satellites—an analysis as preposterous as it was prescient.

John Paul's reign has been so long, and last week's vigil so filled with the imagery of raw human suffering—his last, mute appearance at his window, the increasingly dire bulletins—that it was difficult to bring into focus the extraordinary and vital images of the first days of his papacy, days that helped to re-order the world. Not long after his ascension to the Chair of St. Peter, the Pope declared that he would make a "pilgrimage" to Poland—an event that the Communist Party in Warsaw anticipated with dread. To counteract what it knew would be the destabilizing impact of the visit, the

Party sent out a desperate, secret memorandum to the nation's schoolteachers:

The Pope is our enemy. . . . Due to his uncommon skills and great sense of humor he is dangerous, because he charms everyone, especially journalists. Besides, he goes for cheap gestures in his relations with the crowd, for instance, [he] puts on a highlander's hat, shakes all hands, kisses children, etc. . . . It is modeled on American presidential campaigns. . . . Because of the activities of the Church in Poland our activities designed to atheize the youth not only cannot diminish but must intensely develop. . . . In this respect all means are allowed and we cannot afford sentiments.

John Paul, who, in 1941, as a young man had seen his parish priests arrested by the Gestapo, and the Polish Church subjugated to Moscow after the Second World War, had come into his papacy telling all who would listen, "Be not afraid!" As Andropov understood, in his own paranoid way, this was a message as potentially subversive as Solzhenitsyn's "Live not by the lie!" When John Paul's Alitalia 727, named Città di Bergamo, landed in Warsaw on the morning of June 2, 1979, his reception from the Polish people was as fearless as his own unmistakable message, couched in theological language, that the Polish nation's "voluntary collaboration" with the Soviet empire could not continue. Over nine days, John Paul spoke to and performed Mass in front of millions in Warsaw, Kraków, Gniezno, Częstochowa, and the village of Oświęcim, the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The reception, as Weigel writes in his book "Witness to Hope," was so profoundly emotional, and so obviously po-



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

litical, that during his homily at Jasna Góra, at the shrine of the Black Madonna in the Silesian Basin, the Pope interrupted himself and jokingly wondered what the Italian priests in his entourage must be thinking: "What are we going to do with this Polish Pope, this Slavic Pope? What can we do?" The crowd of more than a million burst into ten minutes of sustained applause. "How many divisions has the Pope?" Stalin once asked, and now there was an answer. "I beg you," the Pope said later in Kraków, "never lose your trust, do not be defeated, do not be discouraged."

Adam Michnik, one of the leading dissidents in Poland, said that the Pope's visit had brought hope, a challenge to "dishonourable living," and the revival of the "ethos of sacrifice, in whose name our grandfathers and fathers never stopped fighting for national and human dignity." On August 31, 1980, four hundred and forty-eight days after the Pope left Poland for Rome, at the Lenin Shipyard, in Gdańsk, an electrician named Lech Walesa signed the agreement (his enormous souvenir pen bore the image of John Paul II) that created Solidarity, the first legal and independent union in the Soviet empire. In March, 1985, a provincial reformer, Mikhail Gorbachev, became General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. In 1990, another playwright-turned-politician, Václav Havel, welcomed John Paul to Prague after the fall of Communism, saying, "I am not sure that I know what a miracle is. In spite of this, I dare say that I am participating in a mir-

acle: in a country devastated by the ideology of hatred, the messenger of love has arrived." And by Christmas night, 1991, Gorbachev, who had found an ally in the Pope, agreed to his empire's dissolution.

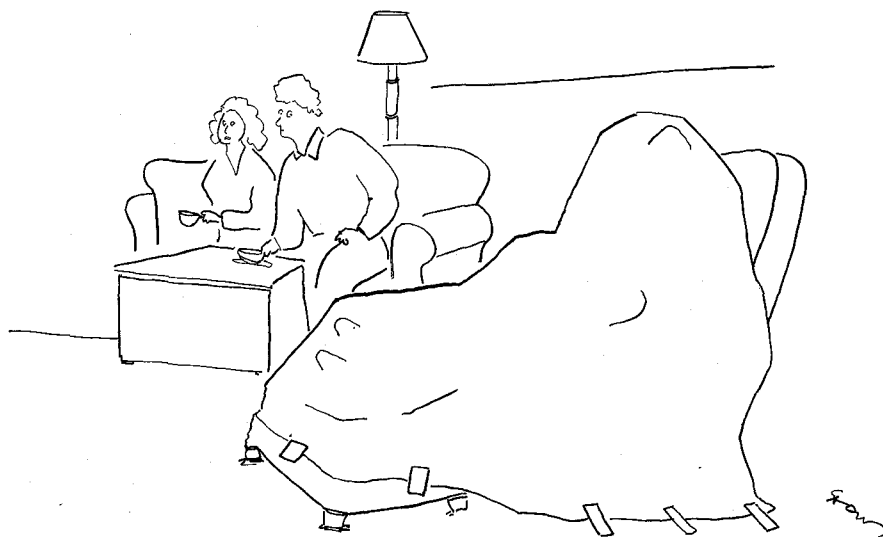
The story of those remarkable years carries with it the temptation of mythmaking and, perhaps, Western self-satisfaction. The Pope's critique of materialism did not end with his opposition to Communism; it carried over to his critique of the Western world, of consumer culture, and of the decline of the Catholic Church in Europe. His papacy has lasted twenty-six years, and his legacy—as a spiritual leader, a cultural critic, a thinker, a politician, a performer in the media age, and, in his last days, a man determined to provide an example from his own visible demise—is so encompassing that no obituary will make complete sense of it. The Pope's awareness of his own consistency provoked in many people contradictory reactions. Even as he supported liberation in Eastern and Central Europe, campaigned against the death penalty, attacked the inequalities of capitalism, and condemned both of America's Iraq wars, the Pope forcefully opposed the leaders of liberation theology in Latin America, and appointed Church leaders who almost uniformly followed his conservative lead on women priests, homosexuality, birth control, and many other issues. Some Catholics, excited by the early euphoria of the papacy, were hoping that John Paul II would follow in the line of John XXIII, the Church

liberal who initiated the Vatican II reforms, in 1962. These Catholics have been gravely disappointed, and not a few of them have drifted from the Church.

John Paul II was formed by the twin dramas of twentieth-century European history—Fascism and Communism—and yet, to his sorrow, he watched the Church in Europe lose ground. In Great Britain and France, the number of church-going Catholics has declined by fifty per cent since the Second World War; in the United States, bishops are deeply divided over the Pope's absolutism on so many issues and the dispiriting effect it has had on the number of churchgoers and young men seeking the priesthood. The growth in the Catholic Church, and perhaps its dominant future, has been in Africa and Asia. In recent years, the Pope has tried to make historical amends—asking forgiveness, for example, for the Church's failure to speak out against the persecution of the Jews. And yet some critics, such as the biographer John Cornwell, have written that the Pope, by not stepping down when he became ill, left power in the hands of Vatican neo-conservatives, who failed to act persuasively on crises ranging from AIDS to sexual abuse by priests.

Last Friday, as the magazine was closing and the news from Rome grew more grave, we talked with Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete, a physicist who decided to study for the priesthood in the early seventies as he sought to understand the political and spiritual upheaval of the time. Albacete, who was born in Puerto Rico and now lives in New York, met Karol Wojtyła in 1976, and the two men became friends.

"I was a parish priest in Washington, D.C., for a very short time and a secretary to the Archbishop when I was told that the Archbishop of Kraków was coming for a visit," the Monsignor said. "The thought that this guy would become Pope was absurd. I was told to take good care of him. He was an intellectual, they'd heard, and they thought I could engage him somehow. We met over breakfast, over cornflakes, and we quickly started talking about the truly big questions. I was just so impressed by the intensity of his humanity, an energy, that, if tapped, could power the whole world. I was seeing him without the props of the papacy. We spoke in Italian, but he joked with me that unless I could speak Polish and read his favorite



"Father is still old-school when it comes to homeland security."

poet, Cyprian Norwid, in the original, well, then I was culturally underprivileged. And, as I am thinking about it now, I remember how he told me about Norwid's poem 'Chopin's Piano,' about Chopin's death and how the end of life is so pregnant with meaning.

"I eventually came to teach a course on the plays that he had written," Monsignor Albacete went on. "I especially liked 'Our God's Brother,'" which Wojtyla wrote when he was still a seminarian. "It's the story of the life of Adam Chmielowski, a nineteenth-century Polish intellectual and painter, who accidentally encounters poverty on the streets of Kraków. He has to ask himself, 'How do I respond to this suffering? Charity? The revolutionary path?' He finally sees that these are all superficial responses and joins the poor, a kind of Franciscan path." In fact, Chmielowski eventually changed his name to Brother Albert, and devoted his life to the poor, founding the Albertine Brothers. "When Wojtyla became Pope, he canonized his own character," the Monsignor said. "There are still some of his plays that remain unpublished. Most of them were written during the Nazi-Communist period, when he was in the cultural resistance."

Monsignor Albacete spent three years in Rome under John Paul in the nineteen-eighties, working on issues of Catholic education around the world, and afterward the two men stayed in contact. As the Monsignor was speaking on the telephone, CNN issued a report—premature, as it turned out—that the Pope had died. "It's very sad but a relief, too," Albacete said. "Lately, when you would see him, his Parkinson's was such that he couldn't respond to you with the intensity he wanted. To take away the ability to talk and move meant that he was losing the means to express his personhood. The last conversation we had was in Rome. I was there because he was beatifying a Puerto Rican, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez. I said, 'I protest, Holy Father! I want to be the first Puerto Rican saint!' He smiled, said nothing. Then I said, 'You know, Holy Father, I'm feeling a little guilty. I've agreed to go on television after you've died to say something or other about you.' He smiled again. Then he said, 'How do they know that I will die first?' He was able to joke. He was not afraid."

—David Remnick

INK TAB WAR



No longer can it be said that the *News*, traditionally the more restrained of the city's rival tabloids, lacks a fighting spirit. The paper, reeling (or so said the *Post*, many times) from a lotto-game debacle that awarded cash prizes to thousands of readers by mistake, stepped up last Monday and finally played Hatfield to the *Post*'s McCoy. First, the *News* touted its own success—"DAILY NEWS AD SALES HIT RECORD HIGH"—while also noting the "sorry picture of the shrinking business prospects of the New York *Post*." Then, over the next several days, it ran a series of articles exposing an apparent "dump-and-pump" scheme at the *Post*, a "frantic, desperate effort" to boost circulation through bulk sales. The *News*, of course, has the higher circulation of the two.

The *Post* had been baiting the *News* for a week, ever since the *News* printed the wrong winning number in its popular Scratch n' Match game, then blamed an independent contractor on Long Island. *Post* editors ordered an all-points assault, marshalling at least twenty reporters and columnists in the cause of exposing their counterparts as "scammers," "goobers," and "pinheads." The time-honored tradition of bestowing derogatory nicknames on rival executives (see Fred "Duckslayer" Drasner) was restored: the Cookie Monster, for the *News*' editor-in-chief, Michael Cooke; the Dunce, for its editorial director, Martin Dunn. Andrea Peyser, whose byline is mysteriously accompanied by the words "Columnist of the Year," filed two righteous missives, and Keith J. Kelly, the media columnist, mocked the publisher, Mort Zuckerman, for being out of town, sailing in the Galápagos Islands, as the ship was sinking back home. Even the cartoonist Sean Delonas weighed in, depicting the typical *News* reader as a bow-tied sad sack and the *Post* reader as a stud surrounded by buxom women.

Best of all were the quotes from the jilted would-be Scratch n' Match win-

ners, many culled from a complaint hotline that the *Post* set up to catalogue all those deferred dreams. Larry Whitt, a forty-two-year-old homeless man who thought he'd won a hundred grand (before taxes), told the paper, "I'm deaf. I'm an actor and model, and I've had many problems due to my hearing loss. I thought the money could pay all my bills, help me start my own American/Italian restaurant, buy a car, help my mom buy a house in Los Angeles, and invest in stocks and bonds."

Last Wednesday, or Day Ten of the *Post*'s "Scratch n' Stiff Scandal" watch, a few dozen Larry Whitt types assembled outside the offices of the *News* for a protest. They passed around photocopies of the previous Friday's *Post* ("NEWS OUT OF SCRATCH") and told anyone who'd listen how much money they were owed. A plaintiff's lawyer, Steven Gildin, addressed the crowd as his partners handed out business cards. "How can a company that publishes information make mistakes?" he said. (The *Post*, the following morning, misspelled Gildin's name.) Then City Councilman Charles Barron called on everyone to boycott the Sunday *News*. The crowd began marching and shouting, "Boycott the *Daily News*!" which turned to "No pay, no readers!" and, eventually, simply "We want money!"

Meanwhile, back from vacation, Mort Zuckerman reported with pleasure that the attention seemed to be increasing Scratch n' Match participation. He also said that the *News*' dump-and-pump story, which referred to "bloody shrapnel from publisher Lachlan Murdoch's carpet-bombing propaganda machine," was not retaliatory. "That wasn't a response, obviously, to this latest—what my grandfather would have called mishegoss, which is a Yiddish word for craziness," he said. "Who was that sociologist at Columbia—Robert Merton?—who said that every group has a reference group? Our reference group is not the *Post*—it is our readers."

Up at *Post* headquarters, Lachlan Murdoch tried to play nice. "We don't really think about the *Daily News* that much," he said. But when he learned that a reporter had spoken with Zuckerman he asked, "How were the Galápagos?" He referred repeatedly to "Scratch n' Stiff," without winking or smiling, and

accused the *News*, on the issue of bulk orders, of being a “pot calling the kettle black,” since the *News* sells a lot of bulk copies, too.

Col Allan, the editor, arrived, complaining about the “hypocrisy of these people,” and seemed more eager for a scrap. “They’re still shoving fifty papers a day in bulk into the prisons of the mentally insane on Wards Island,” he said. “I mean, give me a break.”

“I might even read the *Daily News* if I were stuck in a white padded cell,” Murdoch said.

Allan laughed: “Yes, very good.”

Murdoch said that he thought the nicknames had gone too far.

“It may have been a little exuberant,” Allan said. “But you’ve got to remember that the folks at the *Daily News* have this curious view of the world, and it really is that they feel that they can throw shit at the fan and never get dirty.”

Allan got up to leave. “If they want to attack us,” he said, “they shouldn’t do it in the business section—because nobody reads it.”

—Ben McGrath

LOST TREASURES DEEP



In the 1953 science-fiction thriller “The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms,” a scientist is lowered into the ocean’s depths in a stylized Hollywood interpretation of a bathysphere—a self-contained diving chamber—to look for a giant prehistoric monster that has been awakened from a hundred-million-year slumber by an atomic explosion. “I feel I’m leaving a world of untold tomorrows for a world of countless yesterdays,” the scientist says, just before he and the bathysphere are devoured by the beast, which goes on to trample its way from Manhattan to Coney Island, where it expires amid the flaming wreckage of the Cyclone. The End.

To oceanography buffs, the real bathysphere, a custom-built steel ball with reinforced portholes, is the Apollo 11 of deep-sea exploration. During the early nineteen-thirties, before which no one

had ventured more than a few hundred feet beneath the waves, the famous naturalist William Beebe and his young partner Otis Barton squeezed themselves into it and, attached by a long cable to a ship on the surface, descended thousands of feet to see what they could find.

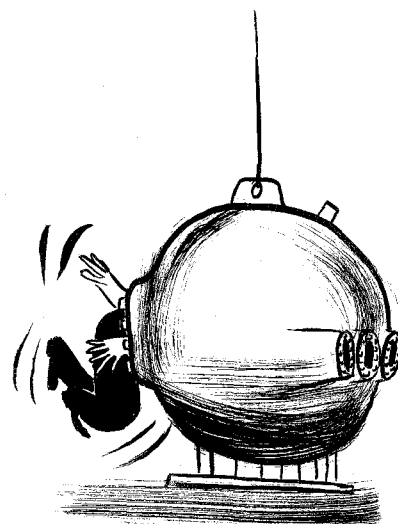
A few years ago, a writer named Brad Matsen, who was working on a book about Beebe and Barton’s underwater exploits (it is called “Descent: The Heroic Discovery of the Abyss”), learned that their bathysphere had gone missing. As far as he knew, it had last been seen on display at the New York Aquarium, in Battery Park. Matsen was in Seattle, so he asked his daughter to investigate. After several phone calls and a subway ride to the end of Brooklyn, she reported back. The aquarium, which had moved to Coney Island in 1957, still had the bathysphere, in a fenced-in scrap yard under the wooden trestles of the same roller coaster where the Beast from 20,000 Fathoms had met its end.

As soon as he could, Matsen made the pilgrimage to Coney Island. “When I first saw it through the chain-link fence, I completely puddled up,” he recalled the other day. “Then I snuck inside the yard and actually ran my hands over it—holy mackerel! I was almost quivering with excitement.” After that, he said, “whenever the writing got rough, and I felt like I needed a little bit of a kick, I’d go and hang out with the thing—it has an aura.”

Matsen, a former commercial fisherman with a weathered face and a gray beard, was back in New York recently, and, on a sunny afternoon, he once again took the F train to Coney Island. Along the way, he vented his frustration with the public’s seeming indifference to an important artifact. “One day, I spent a few hours on the boardwalk watching people to see if anyone would stop to look at the bathysphere,” he said. “They all just walked right by it. I almost wanted to grab them by the shoulders, shake them, and say, ‘Look! Look! It’s like having Magellan’s ship in your back yard!’”

When Matsen got to the Cyclone, however, the ship had apparently sailed: the bathysphere was gone. “It was right there,” Matsen said, pointing at a pile of junk in a weedy lot. A call to the aquar-

ium’s curator, Paul Sieswerda, revealed that the bathysphere had been moved indoors, where it was being spruced up for a gala unveiling in early June. A few minutes later, Sieswerda met Matsen in the lobby of the aquarium, in front of a large tank filled with lazily fluttering cownose rays. He led him through a parking lot to a storage room that was



Bathysphere

cluttered with maintenance equipment and nautical memorabilia. “We have the shark cage from the movie ‘Blue Water, White Death’ kicking around here somewhere,” Sieswerda said.

The bathysphere, resting on two pieces of lumber, was a little bigger than a wrecking ball, with three steel-rimmed portholes. Matsen gasped softly and ran his hand over its peeling, mottled surface. “Oh, man, it gets me every time,” he said. “It’s like some marvellous pentimento.”

As Matsen explained the provenance of each layer of paint, an onlooker decided to climb inside the bathysphere. The hatch was small. Even without the headsets, searchlight, fan, oxygen tanks, and chemical trays with which it would have been equipped during a dive, the interior felt cramped. It also smelled a little unsanitary. Still, there was something soothing—oceanic, even—about sitting alone in the dark.

The reverie was broken by Matsen, who poked his head in the hatch and said, “Mind if I join you?” After some exertion, he managed to work his head and torso inside, but that was as far as he could get. He remained wedged there for a while. “Isn’t this amazing?” he said.

—Adam Green

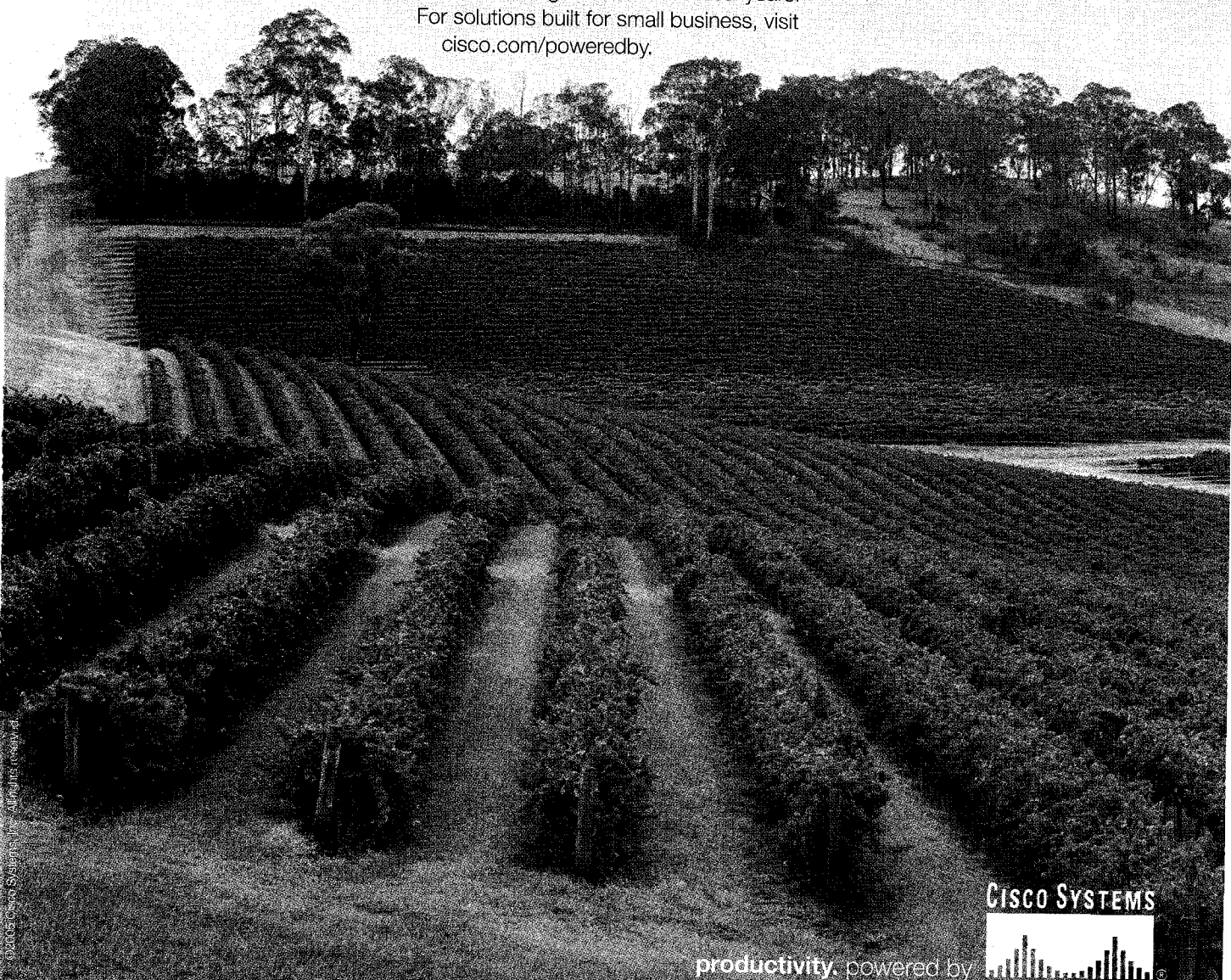
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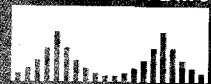
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THE FINANCIAL PAGE ALL TOGETHER NOW

In 1979, Masaru Ibuka, the co-founder of Sony, asked the company's engineers to make him a portable stereo cassette player that he could take on a plane. Within a few days, the engineers had delivered a prototype. The headphones were gigantic, and the device required special batteries, but it worked, and when Akio Morita, Sony's C.E.O., saw it, he realized that this was more than a gimmick—it had the potential to change the way people listened to music. In a matter of months, Sony launched the Walkman, one of the most successful products in history, and the story came to epitomize what made the company great: innovation instead of imitation, a dedication to big ideas, and a willingness to pursue its obsessions no matter what others thought.

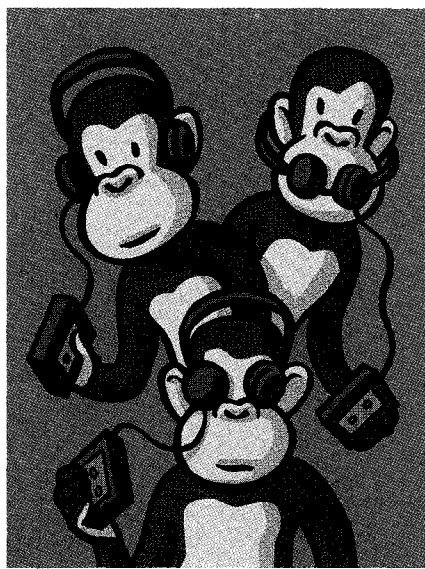
A quarter century later, Sony is still pursuing its own obsessions, but it hasn't produced anything like the Walkman for a long time. Today, Sony is known for floundering into new markets, not for creating them. Its televisions, music players, and portable devices—the old mainstays—no longer lead the pack, high price tags notwithstanding. Its profits have shrunk, and its stock price is a third of what it was five years ago. Last month, the company replaced its C.E.O. with Howard Stringer, the head of its entertainment business, who's neither an engineer nor Japanese. The old ways, apparently, will no longer do.

Companies often become victims of their own mythologies. Sony's track record of game-changing inventions—the transistor radio, the Walkman, the Trinitron—led it to believe that success lay in self-sufficiency and absolute control. Sony's ideal future was one in which just about everything—TVs, DVD players, cameras, computers, stereos, handhelds, digital songs—bore the Sony brand. The company became an exemplar of what's sometimes called the “Not Invented Here” syndrome: if it wasn't invented at Sony, the company wanted nothing to do with it.

“Not Invented Here” is an old problem at Sony. The Betamax video tape recorder failed in part because the company refused to cooperate with other companies.

But in recent years the problem got worse. Sony was late in making flat-screen TVs and DVD recorders, because its engineers believed that, even though customers loved these devices, the available technologies were not up to Sony's standards. Sony's cameras and computers weren't compatible with the most popular form of memory, because Sony wanted people to use its overpriced Memory Sticks. Sony's online music service sold files in a Sony-only format. And Sony's digital music players didn't play MP3s, which is a big reason that the iPod became the Walkman's true successor. Again and again, Sony's desire to control everything kept it from controlling anything.

To be fair, “Not Invented Here” has an



excellent pedigree. For much of the twentieth century, innovation was dominated by big corporations—G.E., Dupont, I.B.M., A.T. & T.—which had gleaming research laboratories and armies of engineers who churned out world-altering creations. But that era is gone. Although successful companies still invest heavily in research and development, they increasingly collaborate with and borrow from others. R. & D. budgets have shrunk at many big companies (which now routinely form R. & D. alliances), and small companies have picked up the slack. Firms that were once exemplars of going it alone have dedicated themselves to playing well with others. Procter & Gamble now gets more than thirty per cent of its innovations from

outside. Pharmaceutical companies rely more and more on partnerships with small biotechs to come up with new drugs. Intel, looking for new ideas, invests hundreds of millions of dollars a year in venture capital. I.B.M. has made “strategic alliances” a cornerstone of its business. Even Apple Computer—once the most imperially self-reliant of companies—has changed. Steve Jobs used to fantasize about controlling everything down to the sand in Apple's computer chips. Today, Apple works contentedly with companies like Motorola and Hewlett-Packard.

The trend, in other words, is toward what Henry Chesbrough, a business professor at Berkeley, has dubbed “open innovation.” With so many companies investing so much money and energy in innovation, it's hard for any one of them to consistently outsmart the rest. And technologies are so complex that it's impractical for a company to gather all the resources it needs under one roof. The spirit of collaboration extends to customers, too. In the new book “Democratizing Innovation,” Eric von Hippel, a management professor at M.I.T., shows that, in fields ranging from surgical instruments and software to kite surfing, customers often come up with new products or new ways of using old ones. Some companies encourage their customers to modify their merchandise. Others, however, do not: when a devoted user of the Aibo, Sony's robot dog, wrote applications that would allow the Aibo to dance to music, Sony threatened the man with a lawsuit.

Ultimately, Sony doesn't have much choice: it will either change or continue to come up short. Companies are a little like nations. In an era of globalization, a healthy economy relies on a steady flow of ideas, resources, and capital from outside. So it goes for a big company, in an era of open innovation. Sony should know. While its mythology is all about self-reliance, its history is full of acquisition, collaboration, and partnership. The transistor radio, the color TV, the compact disk: Sony didn't invent any of these on its own. But it did figure out how to make billions of dollars selling them. If Howard Stringer wants to put Sony right, he should take a hard look at that dancing dog.

—James Surowiecki

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CAPTURING THE UNICORN

How two mathematicians came to the aid of the Met.

BY RICHARD PRESTON

In 1998, the Cloisters—the museum of medieval art in upper Manhattan—began a renovation of the room where the seven tapestries known as “The Hunt of the Unicorn” hang. The Unicorn tapestries are considered by many to be the most beautiful tapestries in existence. They are also among the great works of art of any kind. In the tapestries, richly dressed noblemen, accompanied by hunters and hounds, pursue a unicorn through forested landscapes. They find the animal, appear to kill it, and bring it back to a castle; in the last and most famous panel, “The Unicorn in Captivity,” the unicorn is shown bloody but alive, chained to a tree surrounded by a circular fence, in a field of flowers. The tapestries are twelve feet tall and up to fourteen feet wide (except for one, which is in fragments). They were woven from threads of dyed wool and silk, some of them gilded or wrapped in silver, around 1500, probably in Brussels or Liège, for an unknown person or persons, and for an unknown reason—possibly to honor a wedding. A monogram made from the letters “A” and “E” is woven into the scenery in many places; no one knows what it stands for. The tapestries’ meaning is mysterious: the unicorn was a symbol of many things in the Middle Ages, including Christianity, immortality, wisdom, lovers, marriage. For centuries, the tapestries were in the possession of the La Rochefoucauld family of France. In 1922, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., bought them for just over a million dollars, and in 1937 he gave them to the Cloisters. Their monetary value today is incalculable.

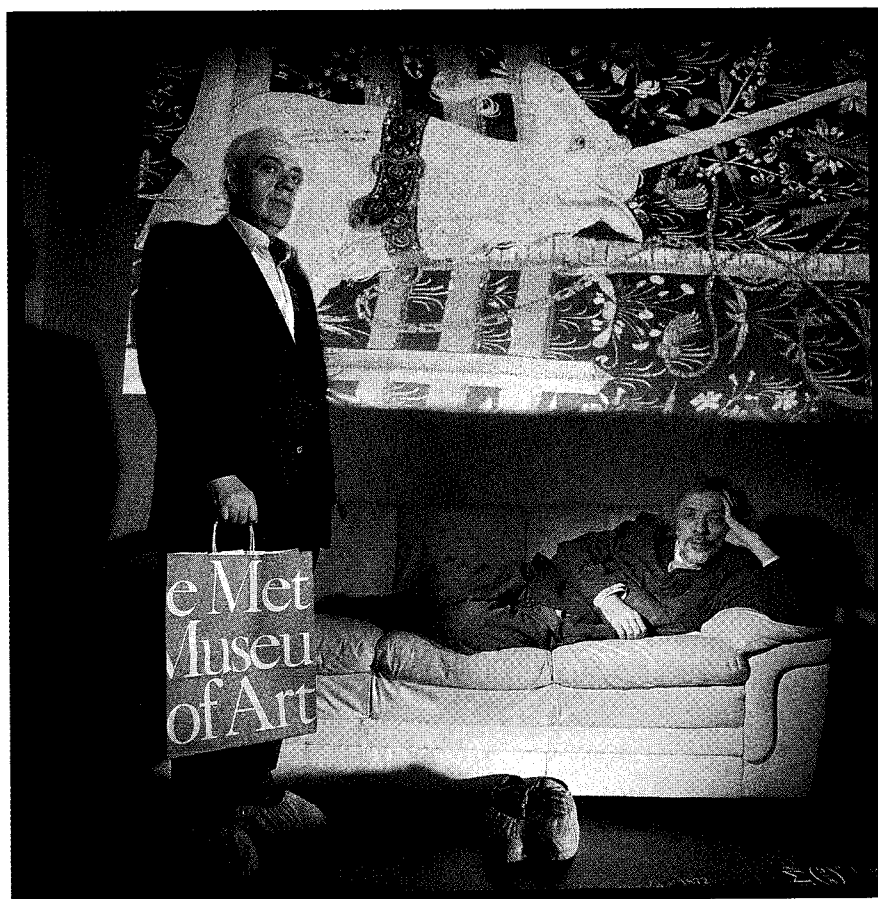
As the construction work got under way, the tapestries were rolled up and moved, in an unmarked vehicle and under conditions of high security, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which owns the Cloisters. They ended up in a windowless room in the museum’s textile department for cleaning and repair. The

room has white walls and a white tiled floor with a drain running along one side. It is exceedingly clean, and looks like an operating room. It is known as the wet lab, and is situated on a basement level below the museum’s central staircase.

In the wet lab, a team of textile conservators led by a woman named Kathryn Colburn unpacked the tapestries and

removed the threads that held each backing in place. As the conservators lifted the backing away, inch by inch, they felt a growing sense of awe. The backs were almost perfect mirror images of the fronts, but the colors were different. Compared with the fronts, they were unfaded: incredibly bright, rich, and deep, more subtle and natural-looking. The backs of the tapestries had, after all, been exposed to very little sunlight in five hundred years. Nobody alive at the Met, it seems, had seen them this way.

A tapestry is woven from lengths of colored thread called the weft, which are passed around long, straight, strong threads called the warp. The warp runs horizontally, and provides a foundation for the delicate weft, which runs verti-



David and Gregory Chudnovsky in their laboratory. Photograph by Dudley Reed.

spread them out face down on a large table, one by one. At some point, the backs of the tapestries had been covered with linen. The backings, which protect the tapestries and help to support them when they hang on a wall, were turning brown and brittle, and had to be replaced. Using tweezers and magnifying lenses, Colburn and her team delicately

cally. Medieval tapestry weavers worked side by side, in teams, using their fingertips and small tools to draw the weft around the warp. When they switched from one color to the next, they cut off the ends of the weft threads or wove them into the surface of the tapestry. The Unicorn weavers had been compulsively neat. In less well-made tapes-

tries, weavers left weft threads dangling in a shaggy sort of mess, but the backs of these were almost smooth. Kathrin Colburn recalls that as she and her associates stared into the backs of the Unicorn tapestries it "felt like a great exploration of the piece." She said, "We simply got carried away, seeing how the materials were used—how beautifully they were dyed and prepared for weaving." An expert medieval weaver might need an hour to complete one square inch of a tapestry, which meant that in a good week he might finish a patch maybe eight inches on a side. The weavers were generally young men, and each Unicorn tapestry likely had a team of between four and six working on it. They wove only by daylight, to insure that the colors were consistent and not distorted by candlelight. One tapestry would have taken a team at least a year to complete.

The curator in charge of medieval art at the Metropolitan and the Cloisters is a thoughtful man named Peter Barnet. When he heard about the discovery, he hurried down to the wet lab for a look. He got a shock. "The first of the tapestries—'The Start of the Hunt'—was lying in a clear, shallow pool of water," Barnet said. The lab is designed to function as a big tub, and had been filled about six inches deep with purified water to bathe the tapestry. "Intellectually, I knew the colors wouldn't bleed, but the anxiety of seeing a Unicorn tapestry underwater is something I'll never forget," he said. When Barnet looked at the image through the water, he said, "the tapestry seemed to be liquefied." Once the room had been drained, it smelled like a wet sweater.

Philippe de Montebello, the director of the museum, declared that the Unicorn tapestries must be photographed on both sides, to preserve a record of the colors and the mirror images. Colburn and her associates would soon put new backing material on them, made of cotton sateen. Once they were rehung at the Cloisters, it might be a century or more before the true colors of the tapestries would be seen again.

The manager of the photography studio at the Met is a pleasant, lively woman named Barbara Bridgers. Her goal is to make a high-resolution digital image of every work of art in the Met's collections. The job will take at

least twenty-five years; there are between two and two and a half million catalogued objects in the Met—nobody knows the exact number. (One difficulty is that there seems to be an endless quantity of scarab beetles from Egypt.) But, when it's done and backup files are stored in an image repository somewhere else, then if an asteroid hits New York the Metropolitan Museum may survive in a digital copy.

To make a digital image of the Unicorn tapestries was one of the most difficult assignments that Bridgers had ever had. She put together a team to do it, bringing in two consultants, Scott Geffert and Howard Goldstein, and two of the Met's photographers, Joseph Coscia, Jr., and Oi-Cheong Lee. They built a giant metal scaffolding inside the wet lab, and mounted on it a Leica digital camera, which looked down at the floor. The photographers were forbidden to touch the tapestries; Kathrin Colburn and her team laid each one down, underneath the scaffold, on a plastic sheet. Then the photographers began shooting. The camera had a narrow view; it could photograph only one three-by-three-foot section of tapestry at a time. The photographers took overlapping pictures, moving the camera on skateboard wheels on the scaffolding. Each photograph was a tile that would be used to make a complete, seamless mosaic of each tapestry.

Joe Coscia said that his experience with the Unicorn tapestries was incomparable: "It was really quiet, and I was often alone with a tapestry. I really got a sense that, for a short while, the tapestry belonged to me." For his part, Oi-Cheong Lee felt his sense of time dissolve. "The time we spent with the tapestries was nothing—only a moment in the life of the tapestries," he said.

It took two weeks to photograph the tapestries. When the job was done, every thread in every tile was crystal-clear, and the individual twisted strands that made up individual threads were often visible, too. The data for the digital images, which consisted entirely of numbers, filled more than two hundred CDs. With other, smaller works of art, Bridgers and her team had been able to load digital tiles into a computer's hard drives and memory, and then manipulate them into a complete mosaic—into a seamless image—using Adobe Photoshop soft-

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ware. But with the tapestries that simply wouldn't work. When they tried to assemble the tiles, they found that the files were too large and too complex to manage. "We had to lower the resolution of the images in order to fit them into the computers we had, and it degraded the images so much that we just didn't think it was worth doing," Bridgers said. Finally, they gave up. Bridgers stored the CDs on a shelf and filed the project away as an unsolved problem.

In 1992, I wrote in this magazine about two mathematicians named Gregory and David Chudnovsky. The Chudnovskys, who are brothers, were born in Kiev. They are number theorists—they investigate the properties of numbers—and they design and work with supercomputers. The Chudnovsky brothers insist that they are functionally one mathematician who happens to occupy two human bodies. Currently, the Chudnovsky Mathematician works at the Institute for Mathematics and Advanced Supercomputing, or IMAS, which operates out of a laboratory room at Polytechnic University, in downtown Brooklyn. IMAS is essentially the Chudnovskys.

Gregory Chudnovsky is a frail man in his early fifties, with longish hair and a beard that are going gray, and sensitive, flickering brown eyes. His health is uncertain. He has myasthenia gravis, a condition that he developed in his teenage years and that keeps him in bed or in a wheelchair much of the time. David is five years older than Gregory. He is a genial man, somewhat on the portly side, with a cultivated manner, and he has curly graying hair and pale-blue eyes, which can have a look of sadness in them.

At the time I wrote about the Chudnovsky brothers, they had built a powerful supercomputer out of mail-order parts. It filled the living room of Gregory's apartment at the time, on 120th Street, near Columbia University. Gregory was living there with his wife, Christine, who is an attorney at a midtown firm, and his mother, Malka Benjaminovna Chudnovsky. (She died in 2001.) David lives on the Upper West Side with his wife, Nicole, who works for the United Nations. The Chudnov-

sky brothers were using their homemade supercomputer to calculate the number pi, or π , to beyond two billion decimal places. Pi is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. It is one of the most mysterious numbers in mathematics. Expressed in digits, pi begins 3.14159 . . . , and it runs on to an infinity of digits that never repeat. Though pi has been known for more than three thousand years, mathematicians have been unable to learn much about it. The digits show no predictable order or pattern. The Chudnovskys were hoping, very faintly, that their supercomputer might see one. However, the pattern in pi may be too complex and subtle for the human mind to grasp or for any supercomputer to find. In any event, the supercomputer used a lot of electricity. In the summer, it heated Gregory's apartment to above a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, so the brothers installed twenty-six fans around it to cool it down. The building superintendent had no idea that the brothers were investigating pi in Gregory's apartment.

While this was going on, neither of the brothers had a permanent academic job. They were untenured senior research scientists at Columbia, and were getting along on grants and consulting fees, and their wives were also contributing to the family income. Their employment problem was complex: they are a pair, yet they would need to fit into a math department as a single faculty member. In addition, they use computers, which some mathematicians regard as unclean. And Gregory is unable to live anywhere except in a room where the air is purified with hepa filters. (He suffers from allergies that could prove life-threatening.) He would require special care and arrangements by a math department, and it wasn't clear how much teaching he'd be able to do.

Shortly after my article was published, the Chudnovskys were approached by a man named Jeffrey H. Lynford, who is the C.E.O. of Wellsford Real Properties, a real-estate investment firm. Lynford proposed trying to raise money to endow a chair of mathematics for the Chudnovskys at a university. In the end, after several years of trying, Lynford and his

wife, Tondra, gave four hundred thousand dollars to Polytechnic University, and this gift, along with others, was enough to partially endow IMAS. The job put the brothers on a more stable footing. Gregory and Christine moved to a specially modified apartment that has filtered air, in Forest Hills, and in 1999 they had a daughter, Marian.

At IMAS, the brothers set about building a new series of computers of Chudnovskian design. The latest of these is a powerful machine of a type called a cluster of nodes. The brothers ordered the parts through the mail. It sits inside a framework made of metal closet racks and white plastic plumbing pipes, and the structure is covered with window screens—those parts of the machine came from Home Depot. The brothers refer to their computer cluster modestly as "nothing." Alternatively, they call it "the Home Depot thing." "To be honest, we really call it It," Gregory explained. "This is because It doesn't exactly have a name." They became interested in using It to crack problems that had proved difficult, such as assembling large DNA sequences or making high-resolution 3-D images of works of art.

One day in the spring of 2003, David and Nicole Chudnovsky were having lunch at the Bedford Hills estate of Errol Rudman, a hedge-fund manager and a patron of the Metropolitan Museum, and his wife, Diana. Walter Liedtke, the curator of European paintings at the Met, was there with his wife, Nancy, who is a math teacher. David began talking about digital imagery. Walter Liedtke, who is a Rembrandt scholar, felt a little out of his depth—"I had the illusion that I actually understood it," he said. "But this was pearls before swine." Liedtke decided to put David in touch with the Met's photographers. Not long afterward, David, along with Tom Morgan, a Ph.D. candidate who works with the Chudnovskys, visited Barbara Bridgers in the Met's photography studio. Bridgers told them, "I have a real-world problem for you."

David left the Met carrying seventy of the CDs of the Unicorn tapestries. He and Gregory planned to feed the data into It and try to join the tiles together into seamless images of the tapestries. The images would be the largest and most complex digital photographs



of any art work ever made, for the time. "This will be easy," David said to Barbara Bridgers as he left. He was wrong.

"We thought to ourselves that it would be just a bit of number crunching," Gregory said.

But, David said, "it wasn't trivial."

The brothers had a fairly easy time setting up the tiles on It. When they tried to fit the puzzle pieces together, however, they wouldn't join properly—the warp and weft threads didn't run smoothly from one tile to the next. The differences were vast. It was as if a tapestry had not been the same object from one moment to the next as it was being photographed. Sutures were visible. The result was a sort of Frankenstein version of the Unicorn tapestries. The Chudnovskys had no idea why.

David, in exasperation, called up Barbara Bridgers. "Somebody has been fooling around with these numbers," he said to her.

"I don't think so, David. Nobody around here could do that."

David informed her that the brothers would need to obtain the complete set of raw data from the Leica camera. The next day, he went to the museum and collected, from Bridgers, two large blue Metropolitan Museum shopping bags stuffed with more than two hundred CDs, containing every number that the Leica had collected from the Unicorn tapestries. There were at least a hundred billion numbers in the shopping bags.

David took the subway back to Brooklyn, stopping off at a supermarket to buy some fruit. In the lab, he put down his things, and Gregory began going through them. "Where are the rest of the CDs?" he asked David. One of the Metropolitan Museum bags was missing.

"My God! I left it on the subway," David said.

Half the Unicorn tapestries could have been anywhere on the B.M.T. They began frantically calling the subway's lost and found. "Naturally, there was no answer," Gregory recalled.

David retraced his route. He found the Met bag sitting under the lettuce bin at the supermarket. Apart from being slightly misted, the CDs were O.K.

Then the brothers really began to dig into the numbers. Working with Tom Morgan, they created something called a



"Beauty is life's E-Z Pass."

vector field, and they used it to analyze the inconsistencies in the images.

The tapestries, they realized, had changed shape as they were lying on the floor and being photographed. They had been hanging vertically for centuries; when they were placed on the floor, the warp threads relaxed. The tapestries began to breathe, expanding, contracting, shifting. It was as if, when the conservators removed the backing, the tapestries had woken up. The threads twisted and rotated restlessly. Tiny changes in temperature and humidity in the room had caused the tapestries to shrink or expand from hour to hour, from minute to minute. The gold- and silver-wrapped threads changed shape at different speeds and in different ways from the wool and silk threads.

"We found out that a tapestry is a three-dimensional structure," Gregory

went on. "It's made from interlocked loops of wool."

"The loops move and change," David said.

"The tapestry is like water," Gregory said. "Water has no permanent shape."

The photographers had placed a thin sheet of gray paper below the edge of the part of the tapestry they were shooting. Each time they moved the camera, they also moved the sheet of paper. Though the paper was smooth and thin, it tugged the tapestry slightly as it moved, creating ripples. It stretched the weft threads and rotated the warp threads—it resonated through the tapestry. All this made the tiles impossible to join without the use of higher mathematics and It.

A color digital photograph is composed of pixels. A pixel is the smallest picture element that contains color. The

Unicorn tapestries are themselves made up of the medieval equivalent of pixels—a single crossing of warp and weft is the smallest unit of color in the image. The woven pixels were maddening because they moved constantly. The brothers understood, at last, that it would be necessary to perform vast seas of calculations upon each individual pixel in order to make a complete image of a tapestry. Each pixel had to be calculated in its relationship to every other nearby pixel, a mathematical problem, known as an N-problem, big enough to practically choke It. They decided to concentrate on just one of the tapestries, “The Unicorn in Captivity.” Gregory said, “This was a math problem similar to the analysis of DNA or speech recognition—”

“Look, my dear fellow, it was a real nightmare,” David said.

“This is like forensics,” Gregory explained. “If the photographers had touched it, we would have seen it in the numbers. The camera was also moving vertically and horizontally a little bit. This made the sizes of the weaves not quite right from place to place. The camera lens itself distorted it a little bit.”

Two of the tiles on the front of “The Unicorn in Captivity” had an eerie green tinge. While the photographers were shooting them, someone had apparently opened a door leading to the next room, where a fluorescent light was on, causing a subtle flare. The Chudnovskys corrected the lighting by using the color on the back threads as a reference.

“It took us three months of computation,” Gregory said. “We should have just dropped it.”

The final assembly of the image took twenty-four hours inside the nodes of It. Gregory and David stayed up all night and ran It from their respective apartments. In the preceding months, each pixel in “The Unicorn in Captivity” had been crunched through many billions of calculations. That last night, there were billions more calculations. By sunrise, the machine had recaptured “The Unicorn in Captivity” in its entirety. The image was flawless.

One day last fall, my wife and our three children and I went to Brooklyn and paid a visit to the Chudnovskys at IMAS, which is in Rogers Hall, on the Polytechnic campus. David met us

in the lobby. He wore a starched white shirt, dark slacks, and Hush Puppies. We were joined by Tom Morgan, a quiet man in his fifties with blue eyes, gold-rimmed spectacles, and a ponytail. He handed us disposable booties, of the kind worn by medical people in operating rooms. David said, “The booties are for the sake of protecting the floor,” and he explained that the floor of IMAS consists of digital images embedded in a soft plastic material. Then we went in.

The IMAS lab is a large, loftlike industrial room, with computer-controlled shades and lights, and filtered air. The lights were dim. The walls are concrete and painted white. The brothers project images on the walls, and they also use the walls as a whiteboard to perform calculations with erasable markers. The walls were covered with scribbles—work in progress. Most of the floor consisted of a vast digital image, in color, showing a hundred and fifteen different equations arranged in a vast spiral that breaks up into waves near the walls—a whirlpool of mathematics.

The equations are a type known as a hypergeometric series. Among other things, they rapidly produce the digits of pi. The Chudnovskys discovered most of them; others were found by the great Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, in the early twentieth century, and by Leonhard Euler, in the eighteenth century. On one corner of the floor there is a huge digital image of Albrecht Dürer’s engraving “Melencolia I.” In it, Melancholy is sitting lost in thought, surrounded by various strange objects, including a magic square and a polyhedron, with an unknown number of sides, called Dürer’s solid. The Chudnovskys suspect that Dürer’s solid is more curious mathematically than meets the eye.

Gregory Chudnovsky was half lying on the couch, in his stocking feet, his body extended, facing the figure of Mel-

ancholy. His shoes, which were tucked inside surgical booties, had been left on the floor. He wore jeans and a soft leather jacket, and he seemed relaxed. Christine and Marian, who is five, were there. Marian was chattering and running around the lab happily. The effect of the child circling over her father’s swirling equations was slightly vertiginous.

“At first, we were going to cover the entire floor with ‘Melencolia,’ but it made people dizzy,” Gregory said. “It made us dizzy, too. So we shrank it and moved it near the couch.”

Close to the windows stood the cluster of bare computers, sitting inside the frame of plumbing pipes and covered with window screens—It. There was a sound of many small whirring fans running inside It, keeping It cool. (I associate this sound with any room professionally occupied by the Chudnovskys.)

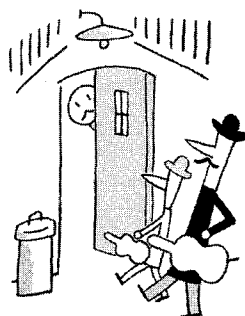
My daughter Marguerite, who is fifteen, wanted to know which of the many equations in the floor was the one that the brothers had used to calculate pi with their previous supercomputer.

“Walk this way,” David said to her. “Now you are standing on the equation.”

She looked down. The equation swooped for a yard under her feet.

At the far end of the room hung two thirteen-foot-tall sheets of cloth, mounted at right angles to each other, which displayed perfect digital images of, respectively, the front and back of “The Unicorn in Captivity.” We walked up to the two pictures of the unicorn. First, I looked at the front. I could see each thread clearly. The unicorn is spattered with droplets of red liquid, which seems to be blood, although it may be pomegranate juice dripping from fruit in the tree. The threads in the droplets of blood are so deftly woven that they create an illusion that the blood is semi-transparent. The white coat of the unicorn shines through.

Then I turned to the back of the tapestry. Here the droplets were a more intense red, with clearer highlights, and they seemed to jump out at the eye. The leaves of the flowers were a vibrant, plantlike green. (There are as many as twenty species of flowers in this tapestry. They are depicted with great scientific accuracy—greater than in any of the botany textbooks of the time. They include English bluebells, oxlip, bistort,



cuckoopint, and Madonna lily. Botanists haven't been able to identify a few; it's possible that they are flowers that have gone extinct since 1500.) On the front, in contrast, the yellow dye in the green leaves has faded a bit, leaving them looking slightly bluish-gray.

Gregory got up from the couch. David warned him to be careful, and he put his arm around Gregory's waist, while Gregory leaned on David and put his arm over David's shoulders. Then the Chudnovsky Mathematician moved slowly across the floor, until the brothers were standing (rather precariously) beside It. David explained that their image of the tapestry was a first step toward making even finer digital images of works of art. He said, "It's simple to take a picture of a Vermeer, but what you really want is an image of the painting in 3-D, with a resolution better than fifty microns." Fifty microns is about half the thickness of a human hair. "Then you can see the brushstrokes," he went on, raising his voice over the whirring of the fans inside It. "You can catalogue the brushstrokes in the sequence they occurred, as they were laid down on top of one another."

Mathematicians, when they work, engage in intensely serious play. They follow their curiosity into problems that interest them and toward the smell of a solution. After playing with the unicorn, the Chudnovskys moved on.

"What are you doing now?" I asked.

David told me that they were working with I.B.M. to design what may be the world's most powerful supercomputer. The machine, code-named C64, is being built for a United States government agency. It's rather like It, multiplied many times over, though nothing in C64 will come from Home Depot. When the machine is finished, it will contain two million processors and fourteen thousand hard drives. It will use two and a half million watts of electricity—enough to power a few thousand homes. Two thousand gallons of water per minute will flow through the core of C64 to keep it cool. If the pumps fail, it will melt down in less than ten seconds.

One day, I went to see the Unicorn tapestries in the physical universe, as distinct from the universe of numbers. It was a quiet winter afternoon at the Cloisters. The gallery

where the tapestries hang was almost deserted. When I looked at them, each flower and plant, each animal, each human face took on a character of its own. The tapestries were full of velvety pools and shimmering surfaces, alive with color and detail. In the fence that surrounds the captive unicorn, tarnished silver, mixed with gold, gleamed in the grain of the wood. In comparison, the digital images, good and accurate as they were, had seemed flat. They had not captured the translucent landscape of the Unicorn tapestries, as the weft threads dive around the warp, or the way they seemed to open into a world beyond the walls of the room.

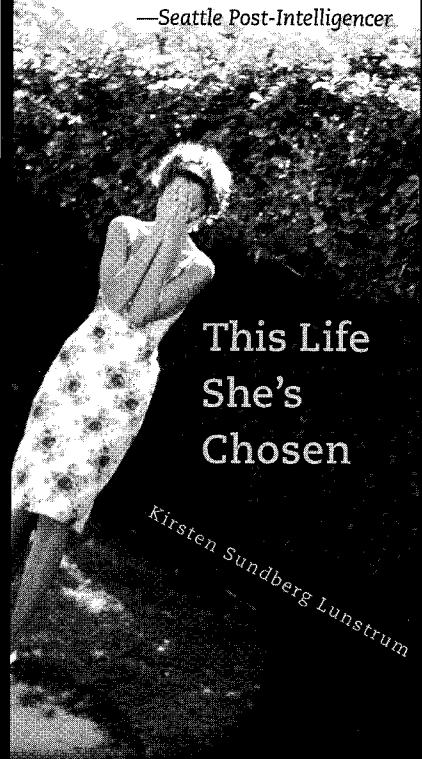
Timothy Husband, the curator of the Cloisters, walked in. He is a tall, polished man in his late fifties, and has been at the Cloisters for thirty-five years. We sat down in one of the window seats facing the tapestries. "There is a luminosity and depth in them," he said quietly. "It didn't come about by chance on the part of the weavers."

I asked Husband how he felt when he was alone with the tapestries.

"That happens on Mondays, when the Cloisters is closed," he said. He spends anywhere from a minute to an hour with the tapestries. "It can be an exceedingly frustrating experience. One ponders so many questions about the tapestries for which there are no more answers today than there were when I was in graduate school." In some of the scenes, the unicorn may represent Christ. Alive and chained to the tree, after its apparent death in the hunt, it may speak of the immortality of the soul. Or the drops of blood may represent the pains of love. The truth is that the modern world has lost touch with the meanings in the Unicorn tapestries. "Sometimes I come in here and try to pretend I have never read anything about them, never heard anything about them, and I just try to look at them," Husband said. "But it's not easy to shed that baggage, is it? And my other reaction, sometimes, is just to say, 'To hell with it, someday someone will figure them out.' And then there is a solace in their beauty, and one can stare at them in pure amazement." ♦

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

GLOBAL WARNING

Mrs. Mortimer's guide to the world.

BY TODD PRUZAN

It's 1855. Do you know where your great-great-great-grandparents are? And more to the point: What's their problem? No matter where your ancestors had the misfortune to live, Mrs. Favell Lee Mortimer likely had something nasty to say about them. The English, Mrs. Mortimer pronounced, "are not very pleasant in company, because they do not like strangers, nor taking much trouble." The Spanish are "cruel, and sullen, and revengeful." In Italy, "the people are ignorant and wicked." The Jews in Poland "are very troublesome. . . . They follow travellers about, offering to help them, and will not go away when they are told." In southern Sweden, "the cottages are uncomfortable." And things were far, far worse in Asia and Africa. Take China, where "it is a common thing to stumble over the bodies of dead babies in the streets." Or Hindustan, where the women spend most of their time "in idleness—sauntering about and chattering nonsense." Or Abyssinia, where the men "delight in slaughter" and one mother "punished her little girl for stealing honey, by burning the skin off her hands and lips."

For the better part of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Mortimer was a literary beacon to an impressionable audience, both in her native England and beyond. She published about a dozen children's books, and by the end of the century her first and most popular title, "The Peep of Day; or, a Series of the Earliest Religious Instruction the Infant Mind Is Capable of Receiving," a children's Bible primer, had sold at least a million copies in thirty-eight languages, including Yoruba, Malayalam, Marathi-Balbodh, Tamil, Cree, Ojibwa, and French. In the middle of her forty-year career, Mrs. Mortimer also published a trilogy of books about the world: "The Countries of Europe Described" (1849), "Far Off; or, Asia and Australia Described" (1852), and "Far Off; or, Africa and America

Described" (1854). Given Mrs. Mortimer's success, it's entirely possible that your own ancestors grew up with her pronouncements on the planet's many filthy heathen cultures.

I first found Mrs. Mortimer's work in an old barn in Martha's Vineyard that houses the Book Den East, with its attic full of swirling dust motes and faded magazines, farmers' almanacs and sheet music. One day, halfway up the History shelf, I noticed a small guidebook with a faded green spine and the title "The Countries of Europe Described." Something so straightforward, so bland, with no author's name on the cover, must be an ancient pocket encyclopedia, I decided. When I pulled the book down, only vaguely curious, it fell open to a field guide to the habits of German women:

The ladies are very industrious, and wherever they go, they take their knitting. They are as fond of their knitting-needles as the gentlemen are of their pipes. The number of stockings they make would surprise you. How much better to knit than to smoke! When they are at home, the ladies spend a great deal of time in cooking; they also spin, and have a great deal of linen of their own spinning, locked up in great chests. Can they do nothing but knit, and cook, and spin? Yes, they can play on the piano, and the harp, and sing very sweetly. But they are not fond of reading useful books. When they read, it is novels about people who have never lived. It would be better to read nothing than such books.

The passage's escalating scorn, with its absolutist damnation of silly women and smoking and novels, actually startled me. Half an hour later, my friends and I sat around our back yard, drinking beer and passing the book around, hooting and slapping our wooden picnic table as we read aloud from the little book's casual condemnations of the Portuguese ("indolent, like the Spaniards"), the Poles ("they speak so loud they almost scream"), and the Icelanders ("I think it would almost make you sick to go to church in Iceland").

Yet months later, as I reread the book, I began to feel unsettled by its systematic

savaging of the entire continent. I'd previously managed to get cheap laughs by reciting passages to dozens of people, but now it became impossible for me to spend even an hour in the book's stern company without feeling queasy. This was partly because I found the writing style so engaging. The voice was direct, persuasive, forceful. The book re-

The floor has no carpet, nor even boards—no—nor bricks—it is the bare earth. . . . Would you rather sleep there or in that little dark room beyond? Look in; it is full of dirty beds, and children of all sizes.” And yet these narrative tricks were used as a means of detailing the faults of all ethnicities—from the Australian Aborigines (who are “too much

skin outside, and it covers your flesh and blood like a coat. . . . How kind of God it was to give you a body! I hope that your body will not get hurt.

Will your bones break?—Yes, they would, if you were to fall down from a high place, or if a cart were to go over them. . . .

How easy it would be to hurt your poor little body!

If it were to fall into the fire, it would be burned up. . . . If a great knife were run through your body, the blood would come out. If a great box were to fall on your head, your head would be crushed. If you were to fall out of the window, your neck would be broken. If you were not to eat some food for a few days, your little body would be very sick, your breath would stop, and you would grow cold, and you would soon be dead.

Among Mrs. Mortimer's other enduring legacies was an innovative set of illustrated phonics cards, “Reading Disentangled,” which were printed in 1834 and have been credited as the first flash cards in history. Her 1857 instructional guide, “Reading Without Tears,” foreshadowed a meme of twentieth-century how-to book titles (“Sex Without Tears,” “Sanskrit Without Tears,” “Toilet Training Without Tears”) that's still in rotation on Amazon.com. “Reading Without Tears,” not surprisingly, was filled with lessons of astonishing cruelty: “What is the matter with that little boy? He has taken poison. He saw a cup of poison on the shelf. He said, ‘This seems sweet stuff.’ So he drank it. Why did he take it without leave? Can the doctor cure him? Will the poison destroy him? He must die.” Sir Winston Churchill, citing the book, in his childhood memoir, as a foundation of his early schooling, sniffed, “It certainly did not justify its title in my case.”

Born in 1802 in Russell Square, London, Favell Lee Bevan was the daughter of David Bevan, a co-founder of Barclay, Bevan & Company, the bank now known as Barclays. Although she was brought up as a Quaker, in her twenties Favell began exploring the Bible with a young university friend of her brother's, Henry Manning. Their talks led to a romantic tension, which escalated with her conversion to Evangelicalism and his appointment to the clergy. By the time she was thirty, however, Favell's mother had advised her to stop writing to young Manning, and the triumph of Favell's publishing debut, “The Peep of Day,” was trampled a few months later by Man-



No matter where your ancestors lived, she had something nasty to say about them.

lied on a no-nonsense tone that might be called the second-person presumptuous (“What country do you love best? Your *own* country. I know you do. Every child loves his own country best”) and a healthy dose of enthralling you-are-there narration (“If you do not like Lisbon when you walk in it, you like it worse when you live there, because it is full of stinging insects; at night the mosquitoes annoy you every moment”). Most thrilling (or, perhaps, terrifying) for Mrs. Mortimer's readers was the author's technique of almost literally walking them into her subjects' homes: “Go in at that low covered doorway, taking care not to hit your head (unless you are only a little boy or girl).

besmeared with grease to be fit for the kitchen”) to the Hottentots (“a miserable race of people”).

Who would write such bad-tempered stuff? The title page of my edition of “The Countries of Europe Described” bore only the coy attribution “By the Author of ‘The Peep of Day,’ &c. &c.” After a little investigation, I discovered the author's name and a few things about her. Mrs. Favell Lee Mortimer was thirty-one when she first published “Peep,” a book that now seems bizarrely sadistic. Here's a glimpse at its opening chapter:

God has covered your bones with flesh. Your flesh is soft and warm.

In your flesh there is blood. God has put

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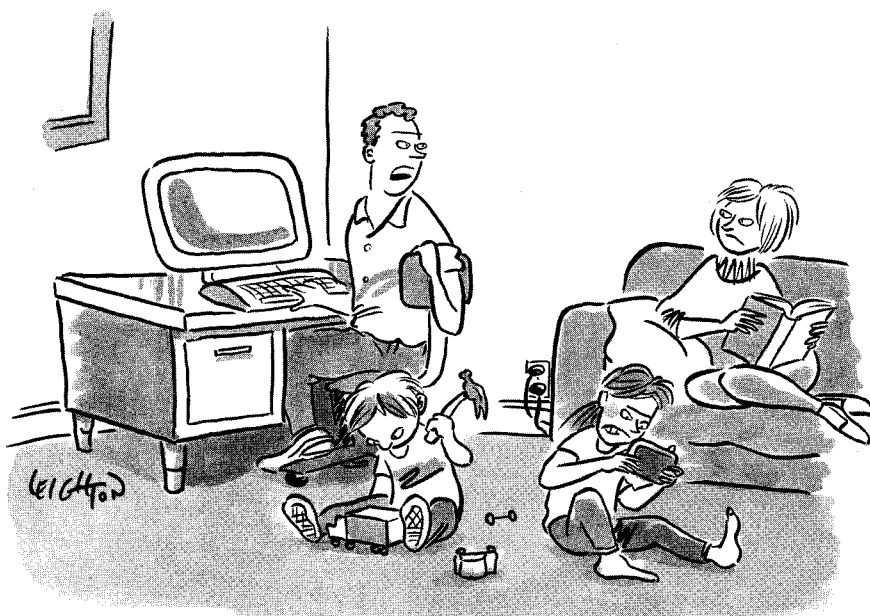
In 1841, at thirty-nine, Favell eloped with the Reverend Thomas Mortimer—by most accounts a cruel, violent husband. The marriage was childless, and she occasionally sought refuge from her husband's rage at her brother's house. In 1847, Manning, whose wife had died after only four years of marriage, and who later became a cardinal, wrote to Mrs. Mortimer, after years of silence, to ask her to return all his old letters.

While Mrs. Mortimer was writing "The Countries of Europe Described," the world was enduring unprecedented turbulence. In 1848, the fires of revolution burned through France, Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, and more distant flash points in South Africa, Ceylon, and Mexico. Yet no one reading "The Countries of Europe Described" would have suspected that much of the world was in flames. "Superficial, incomplete, trifling! Such is the true character of this book," Mrs. Mortimer warned readers in her preëemptive introduction. "Inaccurate we hope it is not; but errors, in spite of care, may have crept in; and the world, old as she is, would not sit still for her picture."

At home in Broseley, Shropshire, just east of Wales, Mrs. Mortimer was suffering through tumult of her own: first, the death of her husband, in November, 1850, followed months later by an even greater tragedy. A 1901 biography of Mrs. Mortimer (called, perhaps inevita-

bly, "The Author of The Peep of Day: Being the Life Story of Mrs Mortimer, by Her Niece Mrs Meyer") describes her horror: "Mrs Mortimer, this spring, had the grief of hearing that her friend Henry Manning had become a Roman Catholic." In the anti-Catholic venom of Mrs. Mortimer's geography books ("It is a kind of Christian religion, but it is a very bad kind"), you can sense the freshness of her romantic wounds. Ultimately, her great unrequited crush would ascend in the ranks of the Church; upon his death, in 1892, Cardinal Manning was revealed to have regarded Mrs. Mortimer not as his first love but as his "spiritual mother." (No hard feelings.)

The two hundred and nine dully impassive pages of Mrs. Meyer's biography offer two striking revelations about Mrs. Mortimer's melancholy life. One is that, despite having written three authoritative books on the countries of the world, full of omniscient anthropological narratives, Mrs. Mortimer appears to have set foot outside England only twice in her life: as a young woman, she visited Brussels and Paris with her family; as a widow, she made it as far as Scotland. Her sources, it seems, were not her own experiences in foreign lands but hundreds of other books, some of them decades old. Slogging through those books surely wasn't an easy task, but shoe leather might have proved a useful research tool. Perhaps she could be forgiven for skipping out on Hindustan



"Me? I thought you were raising them."

and Siberia—but Wales? Her writing desk in Broseley was just a few miles from the border.

The other revelation is that Mrs. Mortimer's personal life could be boiled down to an index of Victorian misery, which Mrs. Meyer catalogued with vicious delight. After just a few chapters, the lives of Mrs. Mortimer's family and friends devolve into a list of misfortunes that include spasmodic cholera, a face crushed by a wagon, erysipelas in the shins, fingers lost while rabbit-hunting, a dressing gown set alight in a fireplace, influenza, water on the brain, an apoplectic fit, asthma, scarlatina, jaundice and pleurisy, blindness and deafness, bronchitis, paralysis, and cerebral weakness. Mrs. Mortimer herself expired—over the course of eleven pages—in August, 1878, at the age of seventy-six.

In 1933, to mark the centennial of "The Peep of Day," the *Times* of London published a caustic reminiscence of the author, written by her nephew, Edwyn Bevan, who acknowledged, "As a whole her life can hardly be thought to have been a happy one." Mrs. Meyer put it less delicately: "Her doctor said she was the only person he ever met who wished to die."

The writers of moral tracts for children in the nineteenth century usually fell into one of two camps: the rational moralists, who taught practical lessons about living in the temporal world; and the Evangelical or Sunday-school moralists, who, like Mrs. Mortimer, promised happiness and salvation through complete subservience to God. Both groups attacked social ills such as drunkenness and gambling, and perhaps the apex of the Evangelicalists' work was in influencing Britain's decision to abolish slavery throughout the empire in 1833, the year "The Peep of Day" was published. Still, the Evangelicalists' activist efforts don't seem entirely heartwarming now. Mrs. Mortimer's geography books leave us feeling morally dizzy, as one page grieves over slavery while the next ridicules the heathen As-Han-Tee worshipper, the bloodthirsty Dahomey warrior, the stupid bushman savage.

Clearly, there was no way for writing as impolitic as Mrs. Mortimer's to age well, but its obscurity today is startling in view of its former popularity. Since the

geography books went out of print, in the early twentieth century, Mrs. Mortimer's name has nearly vanished from history. (A new selection from her geographic works, which I edited, will be published in June, and one volume of "Far Off" was reissued in 2003.) The most recent article about her, a wry letter to the editor from her grandniece, Rosalind Constable, was published in this magazine in 1950. Professors I contacted at the University of East Anglia had never heard of Mrs. Mortimer, although they teach just twenty-four miles south of West Runton, Norfolk, a village perched atop a cliff above the North Sea, where she spent her last sixteen years.

Yet, contrary to what might seem obvious now, the greatest obstacle to Mrs. Mortimer's fame wasn't so much her viciousness as her timing. As she picked up her pen, the Evangelicalist belief system in Britain was slipping into a slow decline. Much of the country was enmeshed in industrial growing pains, and the advance of urban society saw the arrival of Chinese, Jewish, Italian, German, Irish, and West Indian immigrants. In 1829, to Mrs. Mortimer's likely annoyance, Catholics were given permission to serve in Parliament. A radical 1832 law granted suffrage to men whose households could be rented for at least ten pounds a year, and the Chartist movement, which began in 1838 (and ended, unsuccessful, ten years later), proposed to extend voting rights to all males.

By the First World War, a repudiation of Evangelicalism was in full swing in Britain, and the fear and anger (not to mention racism) of Mrs. Mortimer's geography lessons apparently strained the bounds of good taste. Still, it's only fair to note that Mrs. Mortimer's prejudices were both widely held and fit to print when she published them. Encyclopedias from her era were far more poisonous; a passage in the 1854 *Encyclopædia Americana* describing a group of Australian Aborigines, for instance, reads, "They have very disgusting and ape-like features, stand on the lowest step of bodily and mental improvement, and live in a savage state, without laws and without religion. . . . Their deep-sunk eyes betray a rude and malicious spirit, and sometimes, though rarely, a stupid good humor."

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of Europe Described" and its two sequels lies mainly in their linguistic starkness. They are almost entirely lacking in the kind of purple prose and Victorian frills that would have time-stamped their prejudices to eighteen-fifties rural England. Writing for children, Mrs. Mortimer exercised poetic license only in the rarest moments of weakness, as when she mused on the name of Australia's Botany Bay: "It reminds us not of roses, but of rogues; not of violets, but of violent men; not of lilies, but of villains." (I like to imagine the author fanning herself woozily as she pens these words.)

"No doubt," Edwyn Bevan wrote in the *Times* in 1933, "to-day great objection would be felt to some of the pictures put by my aunt a century ago before a small child's mind." Rosalind Constable's letter to *The New Yorker*, written seventeen years later, was more forgiving: "If today we see only the humor (or the pathos) of the sadism that ran like a dark thread through her books, it is only fair to add that she was considered in her day to be uniquely successful in communicating with the child mind."

Mrs. Mortimer seemed to understand the worth of her books, even as they began to fall out of favor. In 1867, one critique led her to wax philosophical: "*The Quarterly* has indeed made me look foolish, but I always knew that the language of the nursery must appear ridiculous to the learned. The Testament has been translated into Piccaninny language for the blacks, and if that language save souls, who shall object?"

In a sense, it was Mrs. Mortimer who engineered her own obscurity. "The Peep of Day" was published anonymously, and each book thereafter was attributed to "the Author of 'The Peep of Day.'" Even the calligraphic ledger of the 1871 census of England and Wales reveals her modesty: she identified herself to her interviewer not as an author but merely as an "annuitant"—a pensioner.

In 1862, twelve years after the death of her husband, Mrs. Mortimer retired to Rivulet House, a ramshackle estate in West Runton. The escape from her former grim life must have felt strange and uplifting. "The country round was romantic, undulating, heathery, and woody; the air soft and sweet when the wind was

not east," Mrs. Meyer wrote in her biography. "She was delighted with the fine air and beautiful scenery, and found great solace in solitary rambles. There were plenty of simple poor to visit and relieve, and there was pleasant society." Mrs. Mortimer made Rivulet House her own private orphanage and animal nursery, adopting strays of the human and other species. (She and her husband had also adopted one adult, Lethbridge Charles E. Moore, who later became the vicar of the local church where she was buried.) She even allowed herself to betray a tiny bit of sunny good cheer two months after arriving, when she wrote in a letter to a relative:

Few countries like this for beauty and freshness. How much I should like to have you and your little ones with me when I visit the beach after breakfast with a train of children—the baby carried by four in a plaid down the stairs which we have cut in the steep cliff; he is so happy among the stones and sands that it is hard to get him up again.

Today, the area around the tidy coastal town of Sheringham, two miles from West Runton, is probably a good deal more suburban and well heeled than it used to be. But glimpses of the old East Anglia remain. At the bottom of a hill, a mile inland from the choppy North Sea, the southbound B1157 abruptly devolves from the two-lane Holt Road into a one-lane street called the Street. To navigate the intersection on foot, I had to scrape my back against the pebbled wall of an ancient cottage and slither along it like a secret agent; there's no shoulder there to shield pedestrians from scampering Mini Coopers. But, once I'd rounded the corner and passed the brooding Red Lion Free House (with its surprisingly jaunty blackboard sign: "Keep Smiling"), I could see the fourteenth-century Upper Sheringham All Saints Church looming ahead. Mrs. Mortimer, I knew, was somewhere out there in the cemetery.

It was a mild Thursday afternoon in March, with white clouds sailing across the sky, and the tilted headstones cast dramatic shadows across the grass. After opening the creaky gate, I noticed that the graveyard stretched far into the distance, which shouldn't have surprised me, given that the church's doors had opened sometime around 1322. The paths creasing the churchyard were patrolled by large, unfamiliar birds—



pheasants? grouses?—and throughout the disorderly rows most of the headstones were faded beyond legibility. Some were listing badly, and many had already keeled over, pinned to the ground by grass and weeds.

I had assumed that Mrs. Mortimer's grave would be easy to find. Lethbridge Moore had "served this cure of souls" between 1862 and 1891, according to a banner inside the church; surely she had got preferential treatment. Outside, though, Mrs. Favell Lee Mortimer had failed to reveal herself by the time the shadows began to lengthen.

Sheringham is a small town, but not too small to have its own museum, whose historian and former curator, Peter Brooks, met me at the building's front door the following morning. Brooks is tall and angular, a retired environmental-health officer, with wispy light-brown hair that sprouts from the crown of his head. He had never heard of Mrs. Mortimer when I first phoned him, a month earlier.

Not much has happened in Shering-

ham since Mrs. Mortimer was buried at the old church. A decade after her death, the first of two railways arrived, turning her isolated fishing-and-farming district into a tourist boomtown of golf courses and gloomy Victorian beachside hotels. Sheringham's last truly exciting moment since then was in January, 1915, when a cottage off Wyndham Street became the first spot in Britain to be bombed by a German zeppelin. (The bomb shattered the roof and landed, without detonating, behind a hastily vacated kitchen chair.)

I explained that I was looking for Rivulet House, and, after consulting a nineteenth-century map of West Runton and comparing it with an aerial photograph of the coastal Cromer Road, I pinpointed the area where it had, and perhaps still, stood—at the corner of Water Lane, less than an hour's walk away. Halfway through my stroll, I found a steep wooden cliffside staircase. I couldn't imagine Mrs. Mortimer and her young friends navigating it with a baby in a blanket—I was amazed that I made it down without twisting an ankle—and the beach, it turned out, was

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a carpet of round gray stones, with a colossal wall of black peat behind it and crashing waves in front. It was hardly an ideal spot for a game of volleyball, but Mrs. Mortimer had made a routine of visiting every day after breakfast with her caravan of orphans and pets.

Clacking over the smooth stones, I recalled a cheerful anecdote in Mrs. Mortimer's "Reading Without Tears, Part II," which, according to Mrs. Meyers, describes a day in April, 1864. Accompanied by six local children, Mrs. Mortimer had driven to the beach in a donkey cart, and apparently decided that the donkey ought to learn the breaststroke. She covered the terrified animal's eyes with a shawl and ordered the children to lead it into the water, but they dropped the reins, and her pet floated out into the waves.

Two quick-thinking fishermen in a rowboat heard the children's screams and dragged the sputtering animal ashore.

Rivulet House witnessed several of Mrs. Mortimer's Monty Pythonesque experiments in animal husbandry. Her nephew described her faulty methodology in the *Times*:

She could not believe that it was good for her parrot never to rest its back, and when she took it to bed with her compelled it by slaps to lie on its back. The unhappy bird died, family tradition asserts, from being washed with soap and water and dried before the kitchen fire. . . . The lamb was also subjected to sea-bathing; the problem of drying its soaked fleece my aunt solved with characteristic ingenuity: she had it left buried for a time in the sand with only its nose protruding.

Was Mrs. Mortimer insane? "It is possible that at the end of her life some de-

gree of softening of the brain may have accounted for her eccentricities," Rosalind Constable quoted her mother as saying. Speaking of eccentricities: it's hard to imagine someone more poorly suited to being Mrs. Mortimer's biographer, let alone her grandniece, than Constable, who, according to her caretaker and close friend, Jennifer Owings Dewey, was the vodka-swilling, iconoclastic lesbian daughter of a Nazi-sympathizing aristocratic London mother. Constable detested her mother's beliefs and sneaked off to Hollywood in 1934, when she was twenty-six. As an arts journalist in Manhattan, from the nineteen-forties on, she became one of the American media's first professional cool-hunters, getting paid to keep the public apprised of the Beats, Pop art, and Elvis Presley. Her avant-garde circle included Patricia Highsmith, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath, Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, Richard Diebenkorn, and Andy Warhol, who, according to Dewey, called her "the den mother of Pop." In her eighties, the stout-guzzling Constable managed to seduce her nursing-home roommate. She died, in Santa Fe, in 1995.

Once I'd reached Cromer Road and Water Lane, I couldn't tell from my maps which building, if any, had been Mrs. Mortimer's. The place looked like an unassuming country club. A small restaurant, the Village Inn, shared the parking lot with a complex of handsome red brick apartment houses with tall chimneys and peaked roofs, but nothing here looked as if it might already have been falling apart in 1862.

Later that afternoon, I met Peter Brooks at his house on Abbey Road, and after serving me a cup of tea he put on a jacket and a houndstooth cap and drove us to the back gate of the Upper Sheringham All Saints Church. We paced through rows of graves, nudging weeds with our shoes to read the blurry inscriptions. Although I had a record of the text on Mrs. Mortimer's monument, Brooks must have known that finding the actual grave would be a daunting task. He and a team had cleared all the weeds in the vast churchyard seven or eight years earlier, he told me, and I understood the implication: his landscaping efforts may have been the first in decades, or longer. Many of the oldest stones in the yard, he guessed,



"How much are the home-run pills?"

were probably buried beneath the grass.

At least Brooks could answer one question: "Peter, these birds, walking around—are they grouses?"

"Pheasants," Brooks said. "Grouses live in Scotland."

The weekend I visited Sheringham, the *Financial Times* ran a story that might have interested Mrs. Mortimer. "MEET THE NEIGHBOURS," the headline ran. "Traditional stereotypes of national character are often out of date, outlandish and outrageously inaccurate. But sometimes they can be uncomfortably true." The article explored the etymologies of five enduring Euro archetypes: how the Spanish became fiery, macho matadors; how the Swedes became either "dour, Lutheran conservatives" or "communists in Volvos"; how the Italians "feign exaggerated gaiety"; how the French resist their encroaching multiculturalism; and how even the fishermen of Greece are wine-dark philosophers.

As I read the piece, it finally dawned on me that cultural stereotypes can have a place in our lives. We all paint the people we've never met and the places we've never been in broad strokes, based on what we've read or heard or seen on TV. Of course, we make such judgments at our peril, but hoary clichés persist and survive because we find them useful. Often, when we want to know how to think about or engage with a representative of an unfamiliar culture, stereotypes are all we have to start with. I remember one morning ten years ago in London, when I told a Jamaican-born cabbie that I was visiting from Chicago. He asked me two questions: if I knew Michael Jordan, and (more cautiously) if I owned a gun. A gun—of course! Chicago! Michael Jordan, Al Capone, *bang bang!*

Mrs. Mortimer's geography books, while giving us a firsthand look at Victorian prejudices, are most darkly amusing wherever her declarations counter the things we think we know. "Nothing useful is well done in Sweden," she asserts. "The carpenters and the blacksmiths are very clumsy in their work." (True or false? That depends on how you feel about your Saab 9-3 convertible, or your Billy bookshelves from Ikea.) And most New Yorkers would be stunned to learn that their home town "is much more

beautiful" than London, "for it has neither smoke nor fog." (Nor, for that matter, does Boston.) Still, the apparent conventional wisdom of the eighteenth-fifties—that the "merry" poor Irishmen are "fond of drinking," that the Chinese "are quiet, and orderly, and industrious," that the Jews "try in every way to get money," that "the poor people of Mexico cannot bear working"—is still disturbingly familiar. For how many centuries have these offensive clichés existed, anyway? And how did they become so ingrained, so widely accepted, that we still have to fend them off like flies? If Mrs. Mortimer were writing today, what would she tell young readers about the Japanese, Arabs, Iraqis, Palestinians, Israelis, Germans, Americans?

Perhaps Mrs. Mortimer would have nodded gravely at the remark made in 2001, by Toronto's mayor at the time, Mel Lastman, to explain his trepidation over an upcoming official visit to Kenya: "What the hell would I want to go to a place like Mombasa? . . . I just see myself in a pot of boiling water, with all these natives dancing around me." Or at the deep thoughts of Italy's minister of tourism, Stefano Stefani, in 2003: "We know the Germans well—these stereotyped blonds with ultranationalist pride, indoctrinated since way back when to feel top of the class at any price. . . . I have never considered the Germans to be endowed with a particularly refined sense of humor." Or at the Russian politician Ivan P. Rybkin, who, toward the end of his 2004 challenge to Vladimir Putin's Presidential seat, disappeared for five days and then resurfaced to offer reporters a baffling, beautiful little pearl: "Tyranny is tyranny. Tyranny in Africa is tyranny, only there they eat people." Or at the United States Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, Lieutenant General William G. Boykin, who told a rapt audience in 2003 how he defeated a Somali Muslim fighter: "You know what I knew—that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol."

Take heart. It's been only a hundred and fifty-six years since Mrs. Mortimer published "The Countries of Europe Described," and a hundred and forty-six since Charles Darwin published "The Origin of Species." Evolution takes time. ♦

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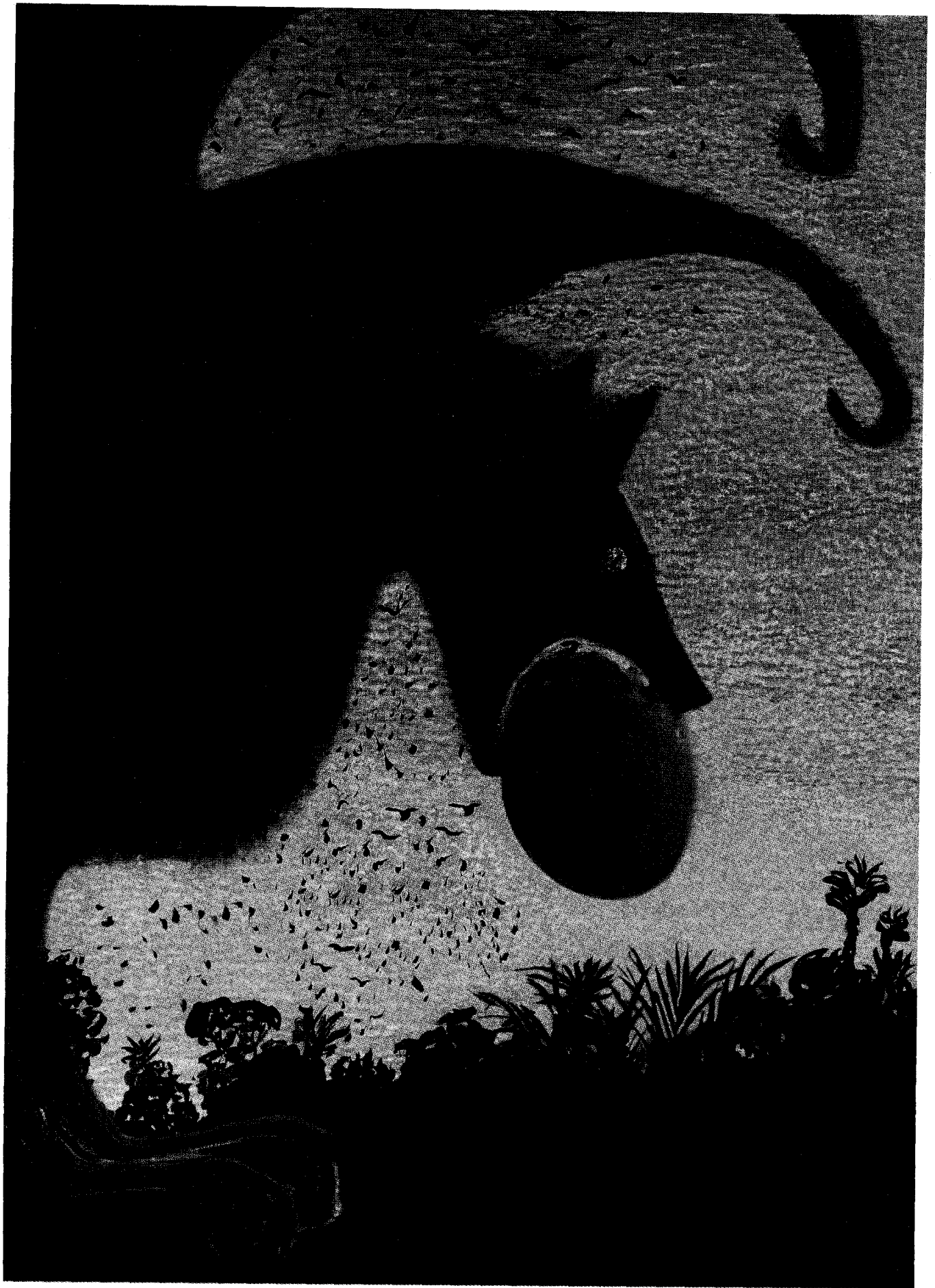
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A new theory suggests that fruit bats—a delicacy on Guam—contain high doses of a neurotoxin derived from cycad seeds.

THE TANGLE

An ethnobotanist tries to solve the mystery of neurological disease on Guam.

BY JONATHAN WEINER

Billy Borja grew up in Sinajana, a hilltop village near the center of the island of Guam. As a teen-ager in the nineteen-fifties, he liked to hunt, and a few times a month he would take his shotgun down into the "boonies," which was what locals called the jungle that surrounded Sinajana. He almost always came back with a deer, a wild pig, or a dozen flying foxes—fruit bats with wingspans of three feet, which were a delicacy on Guam and on Rota, its nearest neighbor in the Mariana archipelago, and on many other islands in Oceania. Borja's mother boiled the bats in coconut milk and served them in the native Chamorro way: heads, wings, hair, and all.

In 1965, when Borja was twenty-three and just married, he left his young wife, Cecilia, and went to California, where he got a job picking apples in the Salinas Valley. From there, he joined the U.S. Navy, and Cecilia came to live with him at the base at Long Beach. When Borja retired from the Navy, in 1985, he and Cecilia decided to return to Guam. He had not been back in twenty years. The Borjas settled on Billy's old family farm in Sinajana with the three youngest of their five children. Cecilia got a job as a government clerk, Billy hunted and fished, and they tended a flower garden together. Guam had changed while the Borjas were away. Even before they went to California, most of the thatched huts had been replaced with concrete houses, which would not blow down in the typhoons. Now there were gas stations and shopping centers in Sinajana. The boonies had been invaded by brown tree snakes. All the birds were gone, because the snakes had eaten them. The fruit bats were almost all gone, too, overhunted by the Chamorros and the snakes.

One day in October of 2002, Borja, a thin, fit man of fifty-nine, was out cutting brush on the farm. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, he stumbled and fell to

the ground. In the next few months, he fell several more times. His wife noticed that he was walking oddly; although his right arm swung freely, his left hung limp. Early in 2003, he developed a shuffling gait and a strange, fixed stare. Borja went to see a doctor at the Guam naval hospital, who referred him to a neurologist named John Steele. "The most striking immediate feature of his appearance is a staring quality of his gaze," Steele wrote in his examination notes. "He blinks very infrequently and when he does, the eyelids close slowly and are slow to open." Borja was able to swivel his eyes to the left and the right but not up or down. Steele had seen that stare before. As a young resident in a hospital in Toronto in the early nineteen-sixties, he and two senior colleagues had identified a rare neurological disease called progressive supranuclear palsy, or P.S.P.; the disease is often called Steele-Richardson-Olszewski syndrome, after the doctors who discovered it. In 1983, Steele moved to Guam, where he still lives; over the years, he has encountered dozens of patients with the fixed gaze that is characteristic of P.S.P. victims.

Steele recommended for Borja a drug usually prescribed for Parkinson's disease, but he was not optimistic. At this point, he suspected that Borja had P.S.P., which is untreatable and implacable. Borja's speech began to slur; he tired easily. He grew weak, and could stand only if two of his sons held him up, one on each side. Cecilia quit her job to take care of him, and when he could no longer walk she and the children drove him wherever he wanted to go. Borja told them that he was frightened. Often, he couldn't sleep, for fear that he might never wake up. One night last August, he grew very agitated. "Why're you whining like a baby?" his wife scolded him gently, although by then he couldn't speak. She reproaches herself now for

not taking the moment more seriously—she was in denial, she says. The next morning, while she was feeding him breakfast in bed, he grabbed her arm and pulled it to his chest, something he had never done before. Their youngest son was getting ready for work, and she hurried out of the bedroom for a minute to help him. When she went back in, Borja was dead.

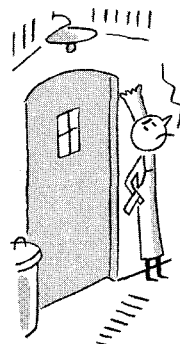
For more than a hundred and fifty years, Chamorros on Guam and on Rota have suffered from a strange neurological disease, which they call lytico-bodig—"lytico" from the Spanish word for paralytic and "bodig" from a Chamorro word for listlessness. The symptoms are polymorphous: some cases present like Alzheimer's disease; others like Parkinson's or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (A.L.S.); still others like P.S.P. These diseases all have in common a peculiar pattern of neurofibrillary tangles in the brain, and for this reason some neurologists call them the tangle diseases. At the height of the epidemic on Guam, in the nineteen-fifties, the incidence rate was as much as a hundred times as high as the global average for A.L.S. In the worst-hit village, Umatac, a small, remote place where Magellan is said to have landed in 1521, during his voyage around the world, a Chamorro lay sick in almost every hut.

In the nineteen-fifties and sixties, scientists from around the world travelled to Guam and Rota, hoping that if they could figure out what was happening in the islands they would have a clue to the cause of some of the world's most poorly understood diseases. In 1956, the National Institutes of Health established a research station on Guam, to look into the cluster of tangle diseases in the Marianas. Clusters of these diseases are usually small; most are statistical flukes. This cluster was by far the biggest on record. It was so pronounced and so geographically isolated that many neurolo-

gists assumed the answer would be easy to find. And the reward would be huge: a scientist who managed to unravel the mystery could help save innumerable lives and would very likely win a Nobel Prize and millions of dollars of funding for research. But by the early nineteen-eighties, when Steele arrived on Guam, the epidemic was already beginning to recede, the research station had closed, and there was still no explanation for the disease, much less a cure. Since then, there has been a dramatic drop in the number of new diagnoses; the only people at risk seem to be those who, like Borja, lived on Guam before 1950 or so. Whatever triggered the disease seems to have disappeared with the Chamorro way of life.

By the turn of the century, the case had gone cold. Fifty years of research seemed to have accomplished almost nothing. On Guam, Steele and a few others still treated and studied the epidemic's last surviving victims. Elsewhere in the world, scientists remembered Guam as a sort of fable of neurology and its difficulties. Then, three years ago, a newcomer to the problem ventured a guess in the journal *Neurology*, provoking the curiosity and skepticism of nearly every specialist who read it. The author, Paul Cox, was an ethnobotanist; as the director of the National Tropical Botanical Garden on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, and an expert on Pacific fruit bats, he was a complete outsider to neurology. But Cox was convinced that he had succeeded where generations of more qualified scientists had failed.

For decades, some Chamorros have placed the blame for the disease on the islands' cycads, which look a little like palms or tree ferns. Cycads are the most primitive seed-bearing plants known on earth—they predate the dinosaurs by tens of millions of years—and their seeds, each about the size of a squash ball, are poisonous. To detoxify them, Chamorros chop them up and soak them in pails of water, changing the water daily for a week or two. Then they use the seed pulp to make flour for tortillas and chips. If dogs or chickens drink the water from the first soaking, they die. Even ants and flies stay away from it.



In the nineteen-fifties, Marjorie Whiting, an ethnobotanist, and Leonard Kurland, an epidemiologist and neurologist, who was the director of the N.I.H. research station, decided that the Chamorros might be right about cycads. Whiting spent a month in Umatac, cooking with the women and recording their recipes. She lived with the Quinata family, who, according to local folklore, were the first people on Guam to come down with the disease, and who had lost someone to it in every generation since the early eighteen-hundreds. The cycad theory gained popularity, and in 1962 Kurland was able to organize an ambitious series of cycad conferences sponsored by the N.I.H. Many of the conference sessions focussed on cycasin, a toxic com-

pound in cycads. But in laboratory tests cycasin did not seem to kill nerve cells. (It did turn out to be a powerful carcinogen, however.) At a conference in 1967, a pair of British biochemists, Arthur Bell and Peter Nunn, reported that they had isolated another toxic compound in cycad seeds, beta-methylamino-L-alanine, or BMAA, an amino acid. BMAA did kill nerve cells, if it was applied in huge doses in a petri dish. But laboratory rodents that were fed BMAA did not get sick with lytico-bodig, and they did not develop neurofibrillary tangles. In any case, the analysis of cycad flour revealed only trace amounts of BMAA. To poison yourself, it seemed, you would have had to eat several tons of cycad chips.

The cycad excitement died down, Kurland left Guam, and in the early eighties the research station's next director, D. Carleton Gajdusek, explored a new hypothesis. Gajdusek, who had worked on kuru disease among the cannibals of New Guinea, and had been awarded the 1976 Nobel Prize (with Baruch Blumberg) for studies of infectious diseases, proposed that the disease might be caused by mineral deficiencies that led to a buildup of aluminum in nerve cells. He collected Chamorro brain samples from autopsies and sent them to a young neuropathologist named Daniel Perl, who was then at the University of Vermont. Perl was becoming well known for having found aluminum in the neurofibrillary tangles of Alzheimer's pa-

tients—data that helped start a minor panic about cooking with aluminum pots and pans. By the end of the first day of his examination, Perl knew that the neurofibrillary tangles in the Chamorro brain samples were loaded with aluminum, too, and at concentrations about ten times as high as those in Alzheimer's patients' brains. Among some scientists, the cycad hypothesis came to be known as "Kurland's folly."

Soon, however, other research began to suggest that the aluminum in the neurofibrillary tangles of Alzheimer's patients might be an effect rather than a cause of the disease. Nonetheless, Gajdusek asked Perl to be the Guam project's neuropathologist. He sent Perl many of the N.I.H.'s Chamorro brain samples, and Perl stored them in what neurologists call a "brain bank." When Perl left Vermont for the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, in Manhattan, in 1986, he took the bank with him.

Cox's theory, which was published in *Neurology* in the spring of 2002 (the neurologist Oliver Sacks, who has written a book on the Guam epidemic, was the paper's co-author), drew together many strands of previous research, and connected them neatly with a single factor that seemed to have been overlooked by everyone who had studied the disease: some Pacific fruit bats eat cycad seeds. Cox suggested that Chamorros who ate the bats might have consumed BMAA in concentrated doses. He noted that the peak of the Guam epidemic had followed the influx of American guns and cash to the island in the first half of the twentieth century. Fruit bats roost in trees and are hard to kill without guns, but one shotgun blast can bring down a few at a time. By the mid-seventies, Cox wrote, the bats had become an endangered species on Guam, and the Chamorros were importing them from other Pacific islands—thousands from Western Samoa alone. These imported bats would not have been neurotoxic, because there are no native cycads in Samoa. That might explain why the only Chamorros to contract the disease were people old enough to have eaten native bats.

A thickset, charismatic, intense-looking man of fifty-one, Cox has spent much of his life either deep in the wild or deep in the laboratory. In repose, he looks pale and scholarly, but when he grins his face

creases with laugh lines like a Western rancher's. He grew up in a Mormon family, in Provo, Utah, and has an easy way of making friends and gripping a shoulder to seal the pact. He has a gift for salesmanship, too, and as soon as his hypothesis appeared in *Neurology* he began barnstorming for it at universities around the world. Cox was well aware that he and his team—two young scientists, who worked with him in a tiny laboratory on the grounds of the botanical garden in Kauai—were venturing into hostile territory. "I'm a botanist—I carry a hand lens," he liked to say, when he lectured to tropical biologists. "My previous expertise is limited to a backpack and a machete." And lytico-bodig was no ordinary problem to neurologists. "As far as I can tell, this is like Fermat's last theorem," Cox often said.

When I first met him, in January, 2004, he was in the process of testing the bat hypothesis, and had been compiling data that he thought would rattle the scientific world. By now, he had published a second paper about his theory, in *Conservation Biology*; the journal's cover showed a color photograph of a bat with its mouth stretched wide around a cycad seed. But he told me that he was trying to keep his latest work quiet until he had published enough papers so that he wouldn't be ridiculed. "I mean, come on, we're gonna get blown out of the water. Our little Mickey Mouse program! When we publish these papers, the response will be shocking and immediate. There will be five hundred reasons why we're wrong. Some of which might be true. Maybe we are wrong. It's a very scary business. These neurologists have such big egos. They're the Porsche crowd. I like flowers. I live in remote villages. Botanists, we're pretty much gentle folk."

Cox first glimpsed the South Pacific's fruit bats when he was nineteen, and was in Samoa on a mission for the Mormon Church. The bats circled above the rain forest like eagles; at sundown, they squabbled in the treetops, drowning out the sounds of the village. They had no fear of human beings. The village chiefs taught Cox the language of orators, and he learned to declaim at village ceremonies, wearing a formal lavalava and a red lei and bearing a ceremonial staff made from a kava root. A year into

his mission, he fell sick with a high fever. While he shivered and shook, a village healer rubbed roots on his head and chest. "That and prayer healed me," he says, with the kind of cheerful laugh that scientists who are religious learn to use when talking about faith with rationalists.

After his mission, Cox studied botany at Brigham Young University, and then ecology and evolution at Harvard; his Ph.D. thesis was on the ecology of the Samoan rain forest, including the bats. He won Harvard's Bowdoin Prize for essay-writing twice: first for a paper about plant evolution, and then for one, written under the pen name Bat Masterson, about plant evolution and Samoan bats.

In 1984, when Cox was an assistant professor at Brigham Young, his mother died, from breast cancer. He considered becoming an oncologist, but decided that, rather than help a finite number of people, he would use his knowledge of rain-forest ecology to try to find a cure for breast cancer. The following year, with his wife, Barbara, and their four children, he returned to Samoa to collect plant specimens. He also continued to observe fruit bats. In a 1997 memoir of his years in Samoa, he describes a bat that hovered just over his head and stared down at him, high on a ridge above the Pacific. He writes, "To have such a gentle but wild creature scrutinizing you under no constraint other than its own curiosity is to feel the

weight of God bearing upon your soul."

It was in Samoa in the mid-eighties, Cox says, that the bat hypothesis came to him. He did nothing with the idea at the time. "I was just too timorous," he says. He returned to Brigham Young, and pursued a promising therapy that a healer in the small village of Falealupo had shown him: an extract from the bark of the mamala tree, which Samoans used to treat hepatitis. Cox brought a sample of the bark to the N.I.H., where scientists found that it contained a chemical that caused a cell infected with hepatitis to eject the virus. A nonprofit research group, the AIDS ReSearch Alliance, is now developing the chemical, prostratin, for use with AIDS patients. Last fall, Cox helped broker a deal between the University of California at Berkeley and the Samoan government. Scientists at Berkeley will try to isolate key genes from the mamala tree; any profits will be shared with the people of Samoa.

Cox has enjoyed a good deal of professional success as an evolutionary theorist and botanist. At Brigham Young, he served as the dean of general education and honors from 1993 to 1997. He has also been an effective conservationist, helping to create a national park in American Samoa; protecting its fruit bats from being exported to Guam as a delicacy; and establishing a foundation that helps indigenous healers and shamans around the world, in return for their setting aside nature preserves on



and around their territories. For one conservation project, Cox and a Samoan chief received, in 1997, the Goldman Environmental Prize, which is sometimes called the conservationist's Nobel. In Samoa, the village chiefs gave him one of their most distinguished titles, Nafanua—protector of the rain forest and deity of war.

Cox has also made enemies along the way. Some biologists say that he is a publicity hound; they call him “the Carl Sagan of Pacific botany.” He is also known for being highly competitive: he once threatened to sue a scientist who criticized a favorite student's work. At Brigham Young, students repeatedly voted him Teacher of the Year, but he angered some of his colleagues by pressing hard for his causes—for example, insisting that the department consider hiring one of his protégés—and by taking many long leaves in Samoa. “Paul has a silver tongue,” one former Brigham Young administrator told me. “He's a very self-serving individual. He caused me more consternation than all the rest of the faculty put together by a factor of about a hundred. He'd go over people's heads—right to the board of directors. A lot of people don't have a lot of love in their hearts for the guy.”

Gary Booth, an environmental toxicologist and Cox's closest friend at Brigham Young, defends him, saying that he is honest and diligent. “I never saw any indication that he was trying to snowball or browbeat anyone,” Booth said. He thinks that Cox's colleagues were just jealous. “Seems to be, either you like Paul

or you don't. There's not too much middle ground.” Another supporter, a neurologist, acknowledges that Cox is driven by something uncommon among scientists. “I didn't know Paul had been a Mormon missionary,” he said. “But I have noticed in him”—he paused and gave me a small smile—“an impulse toward salvation.”

In 1997, Cox left Brigham Young to become King Carl Gustaf XVI Professor of Environmental Science at the Swedish Agricultural University, in Uppsala. The following year, he took up the position of director of the botanical garden in Kauai, and began to work on the bat theory that had first occurred to him a decade before. After publishing his hypothesis in *Neurology*, Cox set out to find evidence to support it. His goal was to trace cycad neurotoxins through the Guam ecosystem: from the plants to the bats and into the brains of Chamorros who had died of the disease. With no advanced training as a biochemist, he had to teach himself. “I'm paddling in weird amino acids, and it feels like I'm drowning,” he says of that time. “My wife's afraid the chemistry books are gonna collapse on my head if there's an earthquake.” Eventually, he realized that he needed to collaborate with someone who had more experience, and he brought in Susan Murch, a plant chemist at the University of Guelph, in Canada. Murch was as much an outsider to neurology as he was, but between college and graduate school she had spent five years as a chemist at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, doing amino-acid anal-

yses in an experimental program for premature babies. Cox also invited Sandra Banack, an ecologist with a special interest in Pacific bats, who had been his first graduate student at Brigham Young, to join the small research team.

In the spring of 2002, Cox and Banack got permission from the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at Berkeley to examine three bat specimens that had been collected in Guam in the nineteen-fifties. They cut off bits of dried skin, with hair attached, and took them in sample bottles to Kauai. Banack worked around the clock, feeding the samples through a high-performance liquid chromatograph, a chemical analyzer that sorted the molecules in each sample. One morning at two o'clock, the results scrolled across the machine's computer screen in a series of jagged peaks. If her measurements were correct, one of the peaks represented the chemical marker for BMAA. It implied that the bats' flesh contained thousands of times more nerve poison than the cycad seeds: a single bat held as much BMAA as a ton of cycad flour. “It's like your heart stops,” Banack told me. “I just looked at it and thought, Oh, my gosh, we're right. I couldn't believe it. Then I picked up the phone and called Paul. He answered the phone so fast I knew he was up. And we just both sat there on the phone in silence.”

Next, Cox collected cycad samples from Guam, from his botanical garden in Kauai, and from two other gardens, in Florida. He and Banack tested cycad seeds and their outer skins—the only part of the seeds that a bat eats. According to their measurements, the outer skin seemed to have a far higher concentration of BMAA than the rest of the plant. They also checked for BMAA in the cycads' roots. Many species of cycad live symbiotically with cyanobacteria, blue-green algae that invade some roots and redirect their growth to the surface. Botanists call these wrong-way roots coralloid: they look like tiny gnarled pieces of coral in the soil around the cycad's trunk. When you break a coralloid root, you can see a shiny green layer of cyanobacteria, almost the color of kiwi fruit. Cox and his team ran ten root samples through the chromatograph, and concluded that the blue-green algae manufacture the BMAA and spread it through the plant and into the seeds.

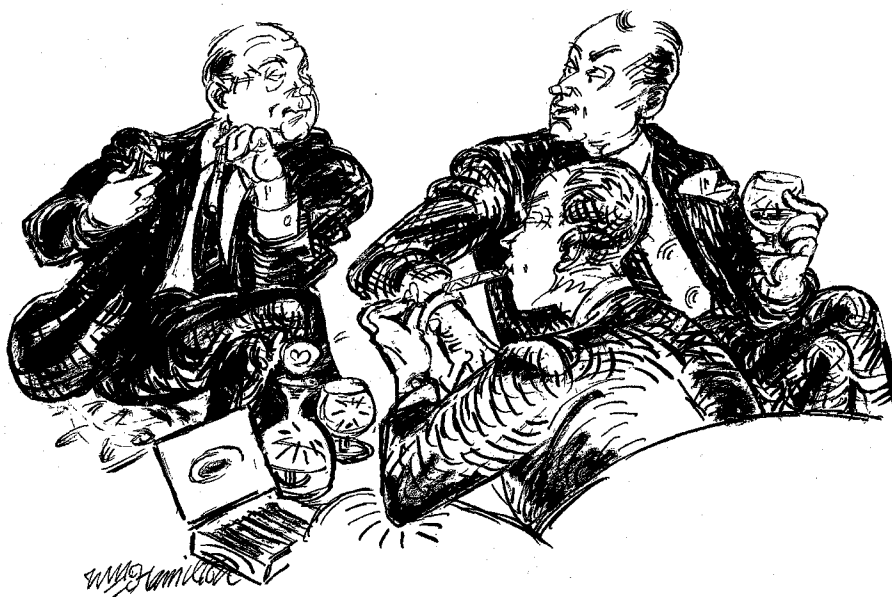


“What can I say? Intelligent design isn't perfect—I forgot to include pockets.”

The next step was to check for BMAA in Chamorro brains, which Cox obtained, with John Steele's help, through Patrick McGeer, a neuroscientist in Vancouver. McGeer sent Cox brain samples from six Chamorros who had died of lytico-bodig, and two who had died of other causes. Bats and cycad chips are so popular among traditional Chamorros that it is hard to find anyone who hasn't eaten them, so McGeer also sent Cox and his team brain samples of Canadians from the Vancouver brain bank as controls: thirteen who had died of causes unrelated to neurodegeneration, and two who had died of Alzheimer's. These tissue samples were pickled in paraformaldehyde. The study would be "blind"—the identity of the samples would be concealed until the end of the experiment.

This time, it was Susan Murch who was alone in the lab when the rows of peaks appeared on the chromatograph's screen. When the blind was broken, she saw that, according to her measurements, the six Chamorros who had died of the disease had BMAA in their brains. Murch also found BMAA in the North American samples—but only in the two Canadians who had died of Alzheimer's. "I can't tell you how shocking and unexpected that was," Cox says. "I started weeping."

In August, 2003, Cox and Banack reported in *Neurology* their discovery of high concentrations of BMAA in the bat tissues and in the cycad seeds. He told the botanical garden's trustees about his findings, and one of them bought the laboratory a second, more expensive chemical analyzer, a mass spectrometer, which Cox and his team used to recheck their measurements. Soon they made another surprising find. They detected BMAA not only as a free compound but also in bound form. According to their data, the BMAA seemed to be doing more than just floating around in the tissues of the cycads, the bats, and the human-brain samples. It appeared to have become part of the tissues, incorporated into the chemical structure of the living proteins. To Cox, bound BMAA represented a crucial piece of evidence for his hypothesis. He speculated that it might help cause the tangles that are characteristic of lytico-bodig, and that it might even explain the tangles of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other neu-



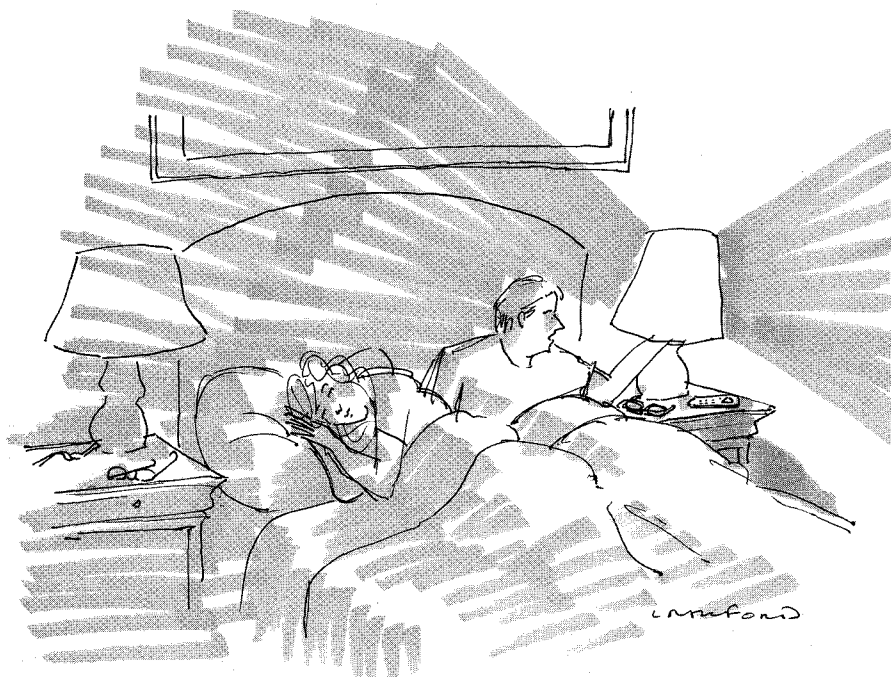
"Maybe saddling them with some debt will help these future generations work off some of their damn obesity."

rodegenerative diseases. It could also explain lytico-bodig's long latency period. "That's key, finding it in protein," Cox told me. "If you claim an environmental neurotoxin is causing lytico-bodig in Chamorros, you've got to explain why just Chamorros and no others on the island get the disease. Bats could explain that. Second, why the latency period? Chamorros can leave and come down with it fifteen years later in California. Why? Well, the protein story builds us a lot. Here's a poison that won't cause acute toxicity. If you've got it in your body, you're getting slowly dosed." This point held a morbid fascination for Cox, and he kept coming back to it. "Your own body becomes a neurotoxic reservoir," he told me.

Cox and his team believed that they had now followed the BMAA from the cyanobacteria in the cycad roots, to the cycad seeds, to the bats, and to the brains of Chamorros who ate the bats. These findings were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. It looked to Cox like a classic biomagnification story: on Guam, Cox argued, the bats seem to have concentrated the cycads' neurotoxins the way algae-eating fish concentrate PCBs, so that by the time the bats had been consumed by Chamorros they were carrying high doses of the poison. Elsewhere on the planet,

where people do not eat bats, they might get concentrated doses of BMAA from cyanobacteria in other food in their diets, or from contaminated drinking water.

Cyanobacteria are the oldest living things on earth. They may go back as many as three and a half billion years. Through photosynthesis, they gave us the oxygen we breathe. Cox began to wonder if they might also be the primal enemy of creatures with nervous systems. By now, Cox was keeping a plastic model of BMAA in his knapsack, and another by his bed. "The molecule from hell," he called it. "It's too bad, because it's a pretty thing," he said. "It's just causing so much suffering, so much agony among the Chamorros—and maybe us also. I'm not a chemist or anything, but this is a bad molecule." Cox knew that he was getting ahead of himself, but he was willing to let his imagination run wherever the story seemed to point. And he thought he could explain why such a common neurotoxin so rarely causes clusters of disease. Cancer researchers talk about gene-environment interactions—some smokers develop lung cancer, while others can smoke without becoming sick—and Cox speculated that there might be a similar genetic vulnerability at work with blue-green algae. The Chamorros of Guam, especially those in remote villages like Umatac,



"Good to meet you, too, Sarah. See you in the A.M."

where inbreeding has been, at times, a reproductive necessity, might carry one or more genes that made them susceptible.

Cox's hypothesis cut across many fields, and in every one of them there were specialists who thought that he had built a big story out of very little evidence. At the University of Guam, for instance, Thomas Marler, a cycad expert who grew up on the island, read Cox's papers and was surprised to see that Cox and his team had put together their picture of cycad BMAA after testing only a few plants. Marler had been working for several years on a study of the plants' biochemistry, involving hundreds of cycads and meticulous sample measurements. He wondered how these scientists could measure the outer layers of three seeds or a single stem and say anything about the typical biochemistry of cycads. Besides, Cox's "typical" cycad was a composite drawn from several plants—from Florida, Guam, and Kauai. "That's just not science," Marler told me. In a paper that is soon to be published in *HortScience*, a journal of the American Society for Horticultural Science, Marler reports that, according to his study, cycad biochemistry fluctuates dramatically from plant to plant and from season to season. He calculates that a sample

size of three would give wrong results about ninety per cent of the time. A sample size of one would be wrong ninety-seven per cent of the time.

The bat BMAA data that Cox published came from only three museum specimens, and, in the same issue with Cox and Banack's paper, *Neurology* ran an editorial by an A.L.S. expert who suggested that the bats might have been atypical, even sickly: "The high concentration of BMAA in the museum specimens may have been the reason why these specific bats became museum exhibits." Cox's announcement of BMAA in human brains was also based on a small number of samples. Douglas Galasko, an Alzheimer's expert at the University of California at San Diego, who runs a Guam research program with funding from the N.I.H., told me that a typical Alzheimer's study would include larger sample sizes. "In the Alzheimer's field, there've been a large number of claims of environmental causes, ranging from spirochetes and viruses to chlamydiae, a form of organism between viruses and bacteria," he said. "Many of these reports were based on microscopic examination of autopsy material which did not hold up to repeated scrutiny." Galasko also pointed out that the specimens had been pickled in paraformaldehyde,

which transforms the chemistry of the tissue it preserves. Measuring amino acids in paraformaldehyde-fixed tissue is not standard procedure and could easily lead even the most experienced chemist astray. "It's just not done," Galasko said.

Galasko conceded that there were once large numbers of Guamanian fruit bats, that some Chamorros ate the bats, and that both the bat population and the epidemic are now in decline; but he said that Cox had not proved a connection. "As a silly analogy, take Spam, which is widely eaten on Guam," Galasko said. Spam was available only after the Second World War, and after Spameating rose, in the nineteen-fifties, the epidemic began to fade. "Well, perhaps Spam is protective against the disease!" Galasko said. "That's the problem with correlations, you see—they do not prove causation." He reminded me that scientists have fed BMAA to animals and have yet to see anything that looks like lytico-bodig. (Investigators are studying some of the other toxins in cycads, including cycasin and steryl glucosides, which some see as much more likely culprits than BMAA.) He also doubts that BMAA could bind to protein as neatly as Cox proposes. Cox's theory, he says, is elegant but unrealistic—"a nice human-interest story that stirs great sympathy."

Cox's historical data have been criticized, too. The centerpiece of the *Conservation Biology* paper is a graph that shows the population of Guam's fruit bats standing at sixty thousand in 1924, then crashing to a few hundred around 1960 and to near zero by 1984. Cox arrived at the figure of sixty thousand by using several sources, including a paper by the leading expert on Guam's bats, Gary Wiles. When I called Wiles, he told me that he had warned Cox's group that the figure was only a very rough estimate. And although Wiles has found cycad pulp in the bats' scat, other naturalists doubt that they eat cycads often. According to Anne Brooke, a government wildlife ecologist on Guam, the cover photograph in *Conservation Biology* was posed. It was taken by Merlin Tuttle, of Bat Conservation International, in Wiles's apartment. "He had a captive bat and stuck fruit in its mouth," she said. The bat was hungry; if Tuttle had given it a chocolate bar, the bat

would have eaten that instead. "Every time Paul Cox comes up with another award or a big glossy story about him, we all just cringe," Brooke said. She and her colleagues on Guam can rattle off many other objections to Cox's hypothesis. For instance, there is a small village next to Umatac called Merizo. Chamorros in Merizo loved to eat bats, too, and yet the disease rate in Merizo was five or six times lower than in Umatac.

John Hardy, an N.I.H. scientist who studies the genetics of neurological diseases, including lytico-bodig, told me that he believed the bat story appealed to Western stereotypes about the Pacific Islands. "I think the evidence is really zero," Hardy said. "Also, the allure of the story is subtly racist—it attracts the popular imagination because it sounds so weird. It's really kind of condescending. We all eat funny things. I'm from North Lancashire, and I eat black pudding. The French eat sparrows. The Chinese used to think we were crazy for eating milk and cheese. We take for granted our own habits and think others are bizarre. We have to be careful we're not just falling for this exotica view."

Cox's most caustic critic is Daniel Perl, the keeper of the Chamorro brain bank. Perl is a slight man in his early sixties, with a salt-and-pepper mustache. When I met him for lunch last fall at a restaurant near Mount Sinai, he wore a dark-blue blazer, and a doctor's ID was clipped to the pocket of his button-down shirt. "I don't want to sound like a disgruntled competitor," he said, after we sat down. "But I think some people who have gotten into this business are swinging for the fences, making statements they have no business making."

Perl told me that he thought Cox's science was generally irresponsible, and would make it only harder to fund fresh research projects in the Marianas. "Anyone who works on Guam—you never lose interest," he said. "It's always in the back of your mind. Kurland said it best: It's like the most fantastic murder mystery you ever read, and you just want to know who did it. And sadly, toward the end, all Kurland cared about was that he wanted to find out while he was still alive. And now I'm beginning to say that. I say from the bottom of my heart—he stretched out his arms theatrically—"I don't care who solves it. I just want

someone to explain it to me. But, along the way, I don't want the path obscured by nonsense! This is a hard enough problem without that." Perl, collaborating with Galasko's N.I.H.-funded group, was trying to replicate Cox's BMAA measurements. He doubted that they would find any.

"I'm not sure what they're detecting, O.K.?" Perl said. "My guess is they're detecting something else. God knows what it is."

For Cox, with so many questions hanging over his research, the sensible thing would have been to stay in the lab and try to replicate his contested results. But he did the opposite. He was eager to show that his findings on the island applied all over the world. "I don't mind being wrong and going down in flames," he told me. "I've had a good enough scientific career that if I flame out that's fine. For me, hell would be that I'm right, but, because of my own inability to figure it all out, the case is not proved for another fifteen or twenty years. My grail now is to raise this story to the level of scientific respectability, so guys with major funds come in—so a few big guys come in with the goal of swatting us."

Last spring, Cox set off with Murch on a BMAA-collecting trip around the world. In the years since Western doctors became aware of the epidemic on Guam, they had learned of similar outbreaks in Irian Jaya, in Indonesia; on Japan's Kii Peninsula, southeast of Osaka; and on Guadeloupe, in the Caribbean. Cox thought his findings might turn out to explain those outbreaks, and others, too. He and Murch trekked on skis with reindeer herders in Lapland: he wanted to see if BMAA could enter the ecosystem through the lichen that the reindeer eat, some of which are rich in cyanobacteria. He went to China to collect sam-

ples of "Lucky Soup," which is made from blue-green algae, and surveyed them in a lab in Zurich, inspecting chain after chain of algae like strands of poison pearls. He bought samples of virtually every food for sale in some of the Kii Peninsula's most remote villages, where the incidence of A.L.S. is now as high as the incidence of lytico-bodig ever was on Guam.

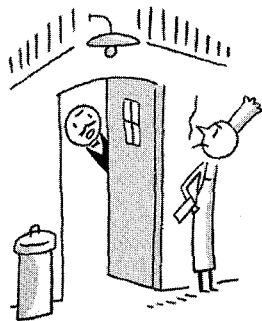
When I visited Cox on Kauai late last spring, he had just returned from Japan. He met me at the airport and put me up at a guesthouse on a beach at the edge of the botanical garden. The next morning, on my way to the lab, I hiked through one of the garden's tropical valleys, stopping to admire waterfalls, lava cliffs, green hills of palms and cycads, and a grove of giant eucalyptus trees. (Steven Spielberg filmed scenes from "Jurassic Park" in that valley.) When Cox found me in the lab, I was staring out the window.

"Sorry about the hellhole I've dropped you into," he said cheerfully.

The lab was well equipped: the chromatograph and the mass spectrometer were both the latest, most sophisticated models. Two big freezers held samples of Chamorro brain tissue that Steele and McGeer, the Vancouver scientist, had shipped to the lab the previous summer; Cox was just getting around to testing them.

At the laboratory bench, Susan Murch wore a white mask and lab glasses and a lab gown. The lab technician, Holly Johnson, wore lab dress, too, except for a pair of flip-flops. The scientists were working their way through their Chamorro and Canadian brain samples, along with vials containing Chinese soup, Japanese fish, and reindeer fur, which Cox and Murch had brought back from their trip. The smell of the human brains in the vials was faintly putrid.

Cox and his crew were working long hours, but it was slow going, and it was clear both to them and to me that they were seriously overstretched. Each of their BMAA data points required an elaborate series of procedures involving vortexing, heating, immersing in acid baths and in liquid nitrogen, and freeze-drying. It took them several days to prepare each brain sample for measurement. Then the vials went one by one into a carousel of the chromatograph, rather like slides in the tray of a projector. At



last, after a dramatic pause, six different lines—umber, purple, lime-green, sky-blue, lavender, and dark brown, each representing a different sample—began inching across the instrument's computer screen from left to right. Most of the samples were clean, but a few of them generated a pronounced spike that to Murch indicated the presence of BMAA. She showed me how she double-checked each of her results with the mass spectrometer, which analyzes compounds by blasting the molecules apart and measuring the charges of the fragments.

Before my visit, Cox had asked me to send him a lock of my mother's hair so that he could demonstrate his methods. My mother had been given a diagnosis of P.S.P., the disease that Steele helped discover, in 2000. By last spring, when I sent Cox her hair, she was almost completely paralyzed, just barely able to swallow puréed foods from a spoon; she could not speak, and her face had become a frozen mask. This January, after years of suffering, she died.

In the lab, I handed Cox two baggies, with locks of hair from two other close relatives. For some reason, I had not got around to cutting a lock of my own.

"Let me do the butchering," Cox said, and made a few snips.

Murch took each bag, numbered it neatly with a pink Sharpie, and entered the number into her lab notebook. Then I entered her numbers into my own notebook, with my own identifications, which I did not let her see. Cox added a few other hair samples, from the freezer. Murch knew that one of the samples in the run was my hair. She didn't know that three other samples came from my family, nor did she know the identity of the two other samples that Cox gave her. But one of those came from a close mutual friend of theirs with brilliant auburn hair, and the other sample was just as distinctive. (Cox has asked me not to describe it.) So for this round, at least, the blindfold was a bit loose.

A few days later, the hair was ready for testing. Murch put each sample into the chromatograph's carousel. The results for five of the six samples were clean: she saw no BMAA. But, when Murch ran sample No. 1528, the line formed a sharp peak. She rechecked that sample in the mass spectrometer, with

the same results. According to her measurements, that peak was the chemical signature of BMAA.

I broke the blind to reveal that No. 1528 was my mother's hair. Cox said, levelly, "She's got it." He looked grimly satisfied. "As scientists, we can't go beyond our data," he cautioned me. "All we can say is, a molecule that occurs in victims of A.L.S. in Guam has also accumulated in your mother."

The next morning, Cox found me walking in the garden. He rolled down the window of his jeep. "Get in. Something exciting happened," he said. He told me that he had been looking at the computer that morning and realized that, with the BMAA measurements from my family's hair, his data had reached the level of statistical significance. "That did wonders for my spirits. I don't mean to glory in your personal anguish, but clearly there's a signal here."

By last fall, Cox had decided to devote himself to BMAA research. As he prepared to step down as director of the botanical garden, some of the garden's trustees and benefactors established a nonprofit foundation, the Institute for Ethnomedicine, to fund his project, and Cox planned to build a new lab back in Provo or in Wyoming. "By a year from now, I want to be pretty deep into neurochemistry," he told me. "See if I can find some way to protect the nerves. It's a risky move. A more rational academic move would be to sit and tie up all the loose ends of what we're doing now. But, again, I want to shoot as fast as possible toward therapy."

His BMAA work had found supporters as well as critics. Raymond Roos, a professor of neurology at the University of Chicago School of Medicine and one of the most measured Guam watchers I spoke with, said, "I admire Paul because he has a new hypothesis and it's a testable one and he's trying to test it. He's an ethnobotanist, so he's got to interact with the right people and do the right experiments. But he's got a lot of experience moving here and there and talking with all kinds of exotic people, so hopefully he'll be successful in doing that."

Cox began collaborating on a separate set of tests by a well-respected neurology group at the University of Miami, super-

vised by Deborah Mash, who runs the brain bank there. Cox's Institute for Ethnomedicine bought the university a high-performance liquid chromatograph, and Mash's group planned to collect samples from A.L.S. patients, compare them with samples from their spouses, and measure the levels of BMAA in A.L.S. patients against control groups. "I'd say the jury's out," Mash said of the research. "But I'd bet on Cox. He's one of the most fiercely intelligent people I've met in a long time." Walter Bradley, an A.L.S. expert and the chairman of the university's neurology department, was enthusiastic. "If Cox pans out, he probably will get the Nobel Prize for this—or should," he said. "It really is a brilliant piece of detective work."

This week, after slowly building his case in papers published during the past three years, Cox, with Murch, Banack, and several other scientists, plans to announce in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that he has found BMAA in species of cyanobacteria that grow all over the world—from the United States to Scotland, Israel, Australia, and Zanzibar, and from the Baltic to the Sargasso Sea. Based on measurements of thirty cyanobacterial samples, Cox and his co-authors suggest that BMAA may link the local problem of lytico-bodig to the global problem of neurodegenerative diseases. If Cox turns out to be right, the blooms of blue-green algae that sometimes cover thousands of square miles of ocean or taint the reservoirs that hold our drinking water may contain a potent neurotoxin. We may risk consuming it wherever we live, whenever we eat a piece of fish or take a sip of water.

In the last days of November, Paul Cox invited a group of scientists to a conference on BMAA in Park City, Utah. Cox had been talking and visiting with all of them, but most had never met each other. One of the world's leading experts in cyanobacterial toxins, Geoffrey Codd, was there from the University of Dundee, where he had been hosting a conference on the global health hazards posed by poisonous algal blooms, mats, and scum. Arthur Bell, who had led the team that isolated BMAA in 1967, and had gone on to become the director of Kew Gardens, came in from London.

So did Bell's colleague in the BMAA discovery, Peter Nunn, and Peter Spencer, who led a famous but short-lived revival of the cycad hypothesis in the nineteen-eighties. Nunn and Spencer had recently attended a conference in Syria on lathyrism, a kind of paralysis caused by eating too many chickling peas. (Spencer has been studying cycasin, the other notorious toxin in cycads.) There were three biologists from Stockholm, and two from the City of Hope, a biomedical research center in Southern California. The two from California reported on their tests of BMAA's effects on fruit flies, experiments they had begun in response to the Guam story. "We're newcomers here," they said.

Cox arranged for the group to be ferried in vans from the conference to a private house for dinner. The house had cathedral ceilings and cathedral-size beams, and it was decorated for the season with holly wreaths and Christmas lights. Outside, there was a foot and a half of new snow. The group settled down around the fire. Oliver Sacks spoke poetically about the extraordinarily long Guam quest. People took turns recalling Marjorie Whiting, Leonard Kurland, and others from the first wave. More than one of the specialists in the room spoke of feeling that an immense jigsaw puzzle was beginning to come together. "The story may be much more complex than we can see from here," Cox said. "BMAA might just be the flag sticking up from the parade of a whole cocktail of nasties coming at us." But he felt more hopeful than ever that BMAA would prove to be a crucial clue.

Cox had invited only supporters to the conference. Meanwhile, Galasko and Perl's N.I.H.-funded group, which had been trying for months to replicate Cox's work using a different set of brain samples, was about to unblind its study. They were unable to find any BMAA in the brains of patients who died from tangle diseases—neither in those from North America nor in Chamorros from Guam—and they have prepared a paper for publication. On the other hand, Mash and her team in Miami tell me that although it is too soon for them to publish, their early BMAA results do match Cox's.

At the close of Cox's conference, the mood was guardedly optimistic. When

the circle broke up, I sought out John Steele. He was wearing a navy-blue blazer and tie; his face was ruddy to the roots of his white hair. Steele has seen the cycad hypothesis wax and wane a few times before, and he has learned to beware of the lure of a good story. Each time, however, he cannot help but be drawn in. "I come from a family that suffers from these diseases," Steele had once confided to me. His grandfather and his mother died from Alzheimer's; his sister suffers from Parkinson's; and a few days before the conference his brother had died from Alzheimer's, too. He had flown in from the funeral, in Toronto. "Understand one of these diseases, you're likely to understand them all," he had told me. His children have often begged him to move on, but he finds himself unable to, particularly now: "I've seen success just beyond the tips of my fingers, and now I think I can see it again."

Before we left Utah, Steele told me

about a Chamorro folktale that traces lytico-bodig to a kind of original sin. According to the tale, Father Cristóbal Ibáñez de San Onofre, an Augustinian priest who came to the island in 1771, placed a curse on the Quinata family. Next to his church in Umatac was a mango tree, from which the villagers were forbidden to harvest fruit. The Quinata family ignored the edict, and Father Cristóbal punished them by afflicting their descendants with the disease. People in the village told Marjorie Whiting that the Quinatas were still stealing those mangoes and selling them in the market, and that was why Guamanians still had the disease—not only the Quinata family but everyone who bought their mangoes.

Steele said that he had once visited the overgrown ruins of the church. Hacking away at the brush with a machete, he found a sprawling old mango, dying, but with new trees sprouting up around it. ♦



"I guess the government spends most of our tax money on defense and the rest is just 'crazy money.'"

PEACE IS A BEAUTIFUL THING

How Mom found her mission, and we went to meet the Pope.

BY SEAN WILSEY

I grew up eight hundred feet in the air above San Francisco, in an apartment at the top of a building at the top of a hill: full of light, full of voices, full of windows full of water and bridges and hills.

My father was a businessman and my mother was a writer. Most days, Mom was at her desk, on the phone, with a yellow legal pad in front of her. She wrote a column for the San Francisco *Examiner*. I came to see her first thing when I got home from school. When she saw me, she smiled, waved, and mouthed the word "Tab." I went down the long upstairs hall, to the bar off the den. I opened a cabinet, removed a cut-crystal goblet, set it down on the Formica counter with both hands—*bng!*—and filled it with icemaker ice. Then I took a Tab from the bar's mini-refrigerator, poured it in the glass, and carried the glass back down the long hall. The ice clinked as I walked. The clinks were like music, like happiness; I jostled the Tab for joy, made it sizzle up out of the goblet like a miniature stadium full of applause.

Mom had published two books and was working on a third, about her childhood in Texas and Oklahoma. As far as I could tell, Dad's job was to please Mom. He was solicitous and full of care. He gave Mom everything she wanted. He helped her want things she did not know to want.

I thought my parents' marriage was perfect until the middle of dinner one night. I was nine years old. This was the second night in a row that Mom had placed her head in her hands and started crying at the table while Dad continued to make conversation as though nothing were out of the ordinary. I said, "Dad, what's the matter with Mom?" He hesitated, and she blurted out miserably,



"Something terrible has happened." Dad said, "We're going to tell you about it after dinner."

Mom and Dad told me that Dad would be moving out. A few days later, I spent the night with him in the Fairmont hotel, and for the first time he told me the following, which he would repeat many times over the years: "If your mother had cared as much about being a wife as she did about being a star, we'd still be married."

Mom was born in 1928, and by the time she was sixteen she possessed great beauty and charisma. But it was not a soft beauty; it was a chiselled, sculptural, architectural sort of beauty (which has barely faded after seventy-six years), a rock-solid beauty that comes of impeccable bone structure, a curvy, zaftig, tense, erectly carried frame, and long-fingered hands that are handsome and uncomfortable, the fingers abrupt and strong and nervous and ringless.

Her parents, Myrtle Caldonia Taylor and Charles Clay Montandon, were evangelical Nazarene ministers—she gentle in the pulpit and hard out of it, he the opposite. In 1896, my grandfather, twenty-one, had climbed a mountain in Tennessee, looked west, and received a vision from the Lord commanding him to go and spread the word. He started out in the streets of Chattanooga, and made his way to Texas. Doing roustabout work in ranching country, he met, wooed, and married my sixteen-year-old grandmother, purchased a carnival sideshow tent, and took her on the road.

Shortly before my grandmother died, in 1979, she wrote a memoir of these years. She described her honeymoon this way: "We spent the night out under

the stars having a couple of quilts and a pillow for a bed on the ground. We had not eaten dinner or supper the day before. We had about \$1.50 and about 75 miles yet to go. My husband stopped at a farm house early that morning to ask if we could get breakfast making clear we would pay for our breakfast. The lady of the house said yes but was curious about us. Later she said she thought we were a couple who had run away from home and married. We were very young. On learning our mission she would not take pay for our breakfast and in addition fed our horse. We became friends for days and years ahead."

Finances were always tight, but, she wrote, "we continued on preaching and working wherever opportunity came, making opportunities when there was none in city jails and on streets under brush arbors too." When they arrived in a new town, my grandfather would pitch the tent, borrow a piano, and start preaching. Eventually, he'd muster up a

COURTESY HORST ESTATE/SEAN WILSEY; OPPOSITE: COURTESY SEAN WILSEY



The author with his mother, Pat Montandon, in the early seventies, opposite. Above: Montandon at a movie premiere in 1967.

congregation, find a suitable plot of land, somehow get it bought or donated, build the church, requisition a full-time minister, and move on. On one occasion, after attending services with my grandparents, a member of the congregation asked my grandfather to come "see a man whom he was having trouble with," my grandmother wrote. "As they came near . . . he called to the man to come outside not for trouble but that he wanted forgiveness. He said, 'I have a preacher with me.' The man reluctantly came out. He put his hand out saying, 'Forgive me. I did you wrong.' It touched his heart. He said, 'I did you wrong, too. Forgive me. I want a better way of life.' With the two, Husband knelt in the yard and prayed. The three rejoiced together and went away in peace with God and man."

When they were done saving souls for the day, they liked to lie down under the stars and make one. Mom grew up the seventh of eight siblings. She was the brazen, silly, gangly, affectionate child who loved being the center of attention, sang loud and tuneless in church, broke her nose on the dash of the car, and had no idea she was pretty, because they never let her know. They lived an itinerant life till my grandfather's kidneys started to fail, and the family settled in Waurika, Oklahoma, where he died.

During the Second World War, when

Mom was a teen-ager, with only her mother and little brother left at home, the rest married and gone, a neighbor lady knocked on the door, which Mom opened with a smile. The woman was so struck she exclaimed, "My! You are the most beautiful thing!"

My grandmother ran into the room and shouted, "Don't you tell her that! It isn't true." It had never occurred to Mom that she might be beautiful. But in that moment she saw that it was a fact. And that it was powerful. It was an escape.

Within a few years, Mom had run off to Dallas and become a model for Neiman Marcus. When my grandmother discovered where she'd gone, she took the train to Dallas and stormed into the store, calling, "Patsy Lou, come out of this wicked place!" She found Mom in a dressing room, yanked her outside by her then still black hair, and sent her to California to live with an aunt. In the San Joaquin Delta, waitressing at a bus station, Mom met an Air Force officer and rancher named Howard Groves, who admired her figure, left big tips, and asked her to marry him. Contemplating the proposal, Mom started having trouble catching her breath, so she went to see a doctor and found out that a valve in her heart wasn't closing properly. Without heart surgery, she would die in her

twenties. At that point, ten people had survived the procedure. Thinking that she'd probably be dead soon—and that her suitor had money enough to support her in the meantime—she married Groves, had the surgery, and became the eleventh to survive. She was an officer's wife for twelve years. Then he hit her, and Mom divorced him. He was, she always says, "boring and sterile—literally, his sperm were incapable of fertilizing an egg—and I never loved him."

San Francisco followed. It was where she'd had the heart surgery—the city had saved her life. She was thirty. It was 1959. She walked into Mr. Magnin's office at the Joseph Magnin department store, without an appointment. According to the story my mother always told, he chased her around his desk. She let him catch up, and slapped him. He was so impressed he hired her.

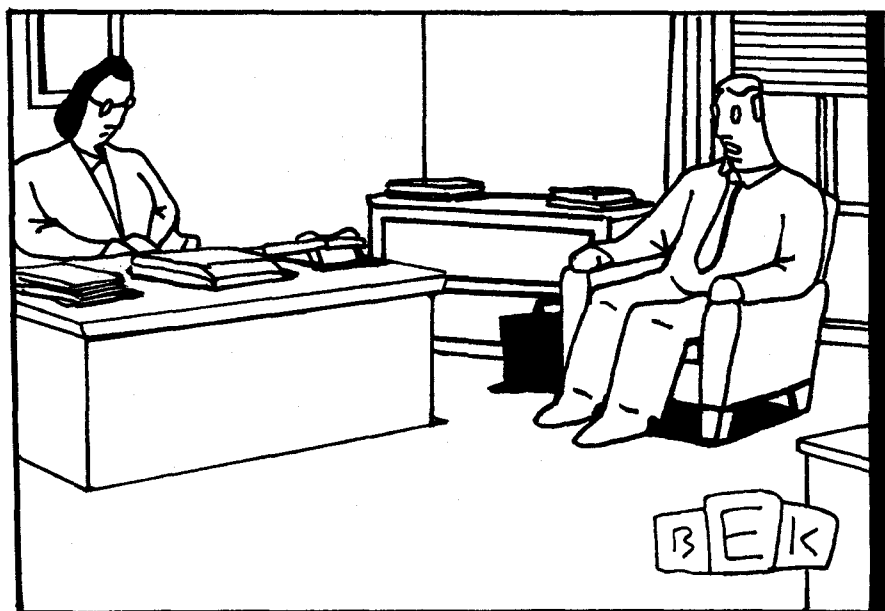
"I like the way you handle yourself, Mrs. Groves."

"Ms. Montandon."

Magnin put her in charge of the high-rolling gentlemen's department, called the Wolf's Den—equipped with club chairs and drinks and salesgirls who dressed up like tarty hostesses. She dyed her hair blond (the only color I've ever seen it), changed the pronunciation of her last name, "back to the French"—from "Mawntandun" to "Moan-tan-dawn"—and had a date every night. She made it into the society pages for throwing flamboyant parties with the assistance of the window dressers at Magnin's. There was a mod party, an astrology party, a come-as-your-favorite-celebrity costume party, a Mexican fiesta. "Pat is the best thing that ever happened to this blasé city. Now every hostess is on her toes, trying to keep up with her," the society editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote.

She auditioned for television and became the host of the "Prize Movie" on Channel 7, with twenty minutes of live on-air talk. She wore frilly boas and evening gowns and ad-libbed. She became a local phenomenon. Mom had a fan club.

She met Melvin Belli, the trial lawyer who defended Jack Ruby, and married him in a Shinto ceremony, in Japan, in 1966. The marriage was legally set aside three weeks later. "30 Seconds Over



"I'm looking for a position where I can slowly lose sight of what I originally set out to do with my life, with benefits."

Tokyo,” wrote Herb Caen, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the *Chronicle*, longtime Mom-chronicler, and enemy.

She published a book called “How to Be a Party Girl.”

Meeting Mom is like meeting a celebrity you’ve never heard of.

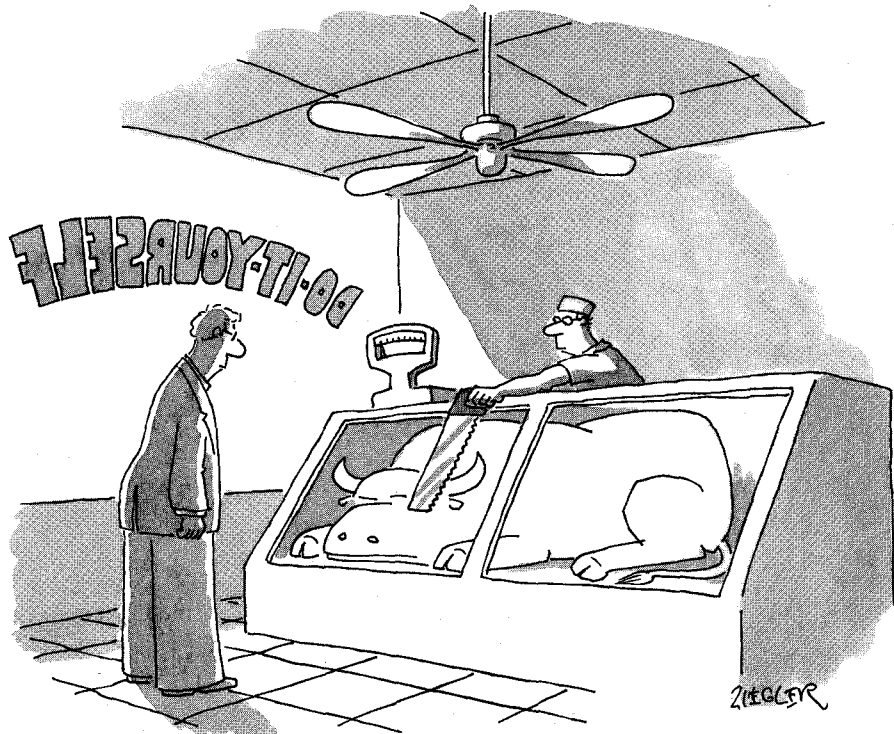
Then: Dad. Recently a widower, he read about Mom in the paper, called her, and said, “If you don’t have any plans, you could come up to my house for dinner tonight. I live near you. I’ve just cooked a chicken.”

Somehow this was irresistible.

My father had already been married in the suburbs, reared four kids, divorced, discovered the woman next door had cancer (they’d been having an affair while he was married to his first wife), married her, watched her die in their bed, taken a shower, called the undertaker, buried her, and, a few years short of fifty, moved into a six-apartment-size penthouse duplex by himself. Orphaned as teen-agers, Dad and his brother had turned a family dairy-products company into a multimillion-dollar food business (they supplied McDonald’s with tallow to fry their fries). Then they went into real estate, and got pilot’s licenses so they could fly out over the country looking for land to buy. They went as far as Oklahoma—Mom country—but made it big with huge parcels south of San Francisco and south of Los Angeles, where they built apartment complexes worth hundreds of millions of dollars today. Dad’s brother died, and by the time his second wife died, a few months later, he had left or been left by everyone of significance in his life. He drove down Russian Hill and drove Mom back up. He told Mom he was just sitting up there waiting to die and she’d saved his life by coming for dinner.

Dad got Mom to consent to something called a bifurcated divorce—their marriage was legally over and he was free to remarry just a few months after he moved out. Custody of me was to be split between them. But they would go to court to settle their disputes over money and property.

In court, Dad, viciously businesslike, stripped Mom of any claims to his prop-



erty by producing a signed prenuptial agreement. Mom says she never signed it. She even found thirteen-year-old plane tickets that showed she was in L.A. (taping a television show) on the day it was dated. Didn’t matter. Dad had several witnesses. One remembered Mom saying, “I’ve signed away my right to be rich.”

Mom’s lawyer told her to itemize a month’s worth of expenses and ask for them as alimony. She took the largest sums of money she’d ever spent on every single thing in her life and threw them all onto a list as monthly expenses. Dad told the judge that her expenses were “appropriate for Prince Charles and the deceased Shah of Iran.”

Mom, ignorant and arrogant, described in one article as “wearing knee-high cherry-red boots, doeskin pants and matching red sweater” on the stand, did everything wrong. And the whole city thrilled to see her lose her mind, her dignity, her husband, and a fortune. For an entire Wednesday, a d.j. on a popular radio station simply repeated “Five hundred dollars a month on flowers” every time he was supposed to do a station identification. Herb Caen attacked her mercilessly in his morning column, bestowing a series of nicknames on her: “The Blond Dumbshell,”

“Ms. Pushy Galore,” “Pat Montrachet (a dry white).” Dad was “the splendid rich chap” and “Mr. Big Bucks Nizeguy.” The writer Armistead Maupin, whose “Tales of the City” was being serialized in the *Chronicle*, brought Mom in as a character:

People said the meanest things about Prue Giroux. They said her looks had gotten her everything. Her social aspirations—they said—were tainted by a kind of girlish desperation which rendered her utterly impotent as a Beautiful Person. Furthermore, her husband . . . had always been “the nice one.” . . . She was a simple country girl from Grass Valley: a tractor salesman’s daughter.

Prue/Mom was: “too awful for words,” a “hopelessly common woman,” a “ridiculous woman,” and a “pathetic creature who spends her time bragging about how far she’s come.”

The divorce made it all the way to the *National Enquirer*, which ran a large photograph of Mom under the headline “THE WORLD’S MOST EXPENSIVE WIFE” (Dad’s phrase). This was “Dallas” and “Dynasty” and Danielle Steel come to life.

When the trial was over, the judge gave Mom the penthouse and twenty thousand dollars a month for six years. She declared, “Your dad *bought the judge*,” then burst into tears, and went to bed for several weeks.

I was impressed that Dad was *so por-*

erful. Shortly after bifurcating the divorce, he'd married my mom's much younger friend Dede.

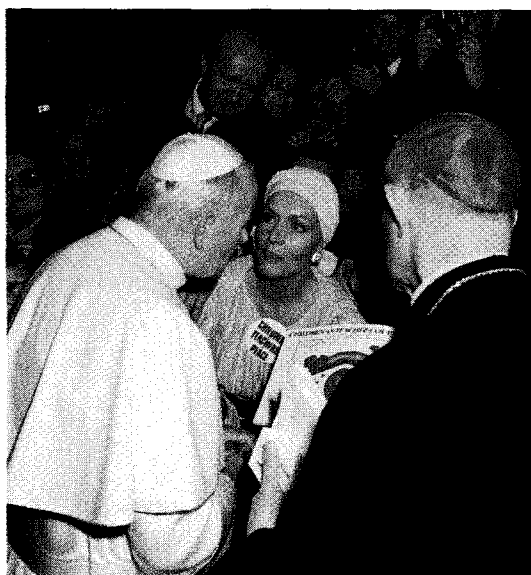
The custody agreement between my parents had me spending a week with Mom and a week with Dad—like a business traveller—and alternating vacations. I packed a bag and switched

flashed with desire, swam with confusion, then clouded with fear. All these emotions made me nervous. I loved Mom. I admired her. But her dramatic excesses were one of the only topics Dad and I could agree on. Dad seemed to love me when we were disparaging her larger-than-life-ness together.

I looked up “remorse”: “a gnawing distress arising from a sense of guilt for past wrongs.”

On the walk, Dad said, “When I die, I don’t want you to feel any remorse. But you’re going to feel a lot of it.”

He was silent for a moment, then he added, “I had you late in life, Sean, so we’re going to have a very limited



Montandon with Pope John Paul II, in 1982; Children as Teachers of Peace with Indira Gandhi (the author stands to her left).

houses on Monday. Every other weekend, I’d go to my dad’s country house, in Napa, the house that Mom—for whom a gracious home in the country was a life’s aspiration—had designed down to the smallest detail.

When my stepmother took over Mom’s Napa Valley dream house, she placed a needlepoint pillow on a couch in the living room, and did almost no other redecorating. The stitching on the pillow read:

YOU CAN NEVER
BE TOO THIN
OR TOO RICH

Mom tried to reach me there, dialling what had for years been her own phone number but was now Dad and Dede’s. Dede answered, and, Mom’s story goes, this exchange followed:

Mom: “Is this the bitch who stole my husband?”

Dede (singsongy): “Yes, iit iis!”

“You know what I’ve been thinking about doing, Sean?” Mom said late one Sunday night, as I was packing to go back to Dad’s. Her eyes

Mom’s posture changed, became immaculate. She looked as if she were onstage as she said, “You know what I think I’ll do next weekend while you’re in my house with your father and that woman? I think I’ll get in the car and drive up there, turn down the driveway, and just keep on going—right through the front door, and kill myself!” She grabbed my arm. “And kill them, too!”

I decided to pay detailed attention to the nuances of her sentences here. She’d said, “You know what I *think* I’ll do.” It was all speculative.

Now Mom was crying. “They’ve hurt me so much. They’ve driven me to it. They’ve taken everything from me. Even you. Why *not* my life?”

Technically, they have not taken me, I thought.

Shortly after Mom told me about her impending death, Dad did his own version of the same thing. He said, “Let’s go out for a walk, but, before we go out, look up the word ‘remorse’ in the dictionary, and then come find me.”

time together. But Dede will be here long after I’m gone, and you’ll have to get along with her. So be good to Dede. Be good to Dede now. That’s how you’ll make points and get more out of me.” By “points” he meant affection. By “get more out of me” he meant—what? Time, I hoped. He went on, “I was fifty when you were born. You missed out on the father-and-son activities, the hunting and fishing. I’m like a building: a bit run-down now. And you’re a tenant with a short-term lease.”

I asked him, “Did you feel remorse when your parents died?”

“No,” he said. “I didn’t. But you *will* feel it. It’s inevitable. But try not to. Try to avoid it. Remorse is a useless emotion.”

And then came the culmination of this period, the event that is always in the present tense.

I’m eleven. Mom comes out of her bedroom in a long white nightgown and sits down at the top of the steps overlooking the city. She looks defeated, miserable. She’s been spending all her time

COURTESY SEAN WILSEY

in bed, but not sleeping. She asks me to sit down with her. She has something to tell me. We stare out at the view. "Sean," she says, "I'm going to kill myself tonight and I want you to kill yourself with me."

No "I think," no "maybe," no "may." I try to hear it that way: *Sean, [I think] I'm [maybe] going to kill myself tonight and I*



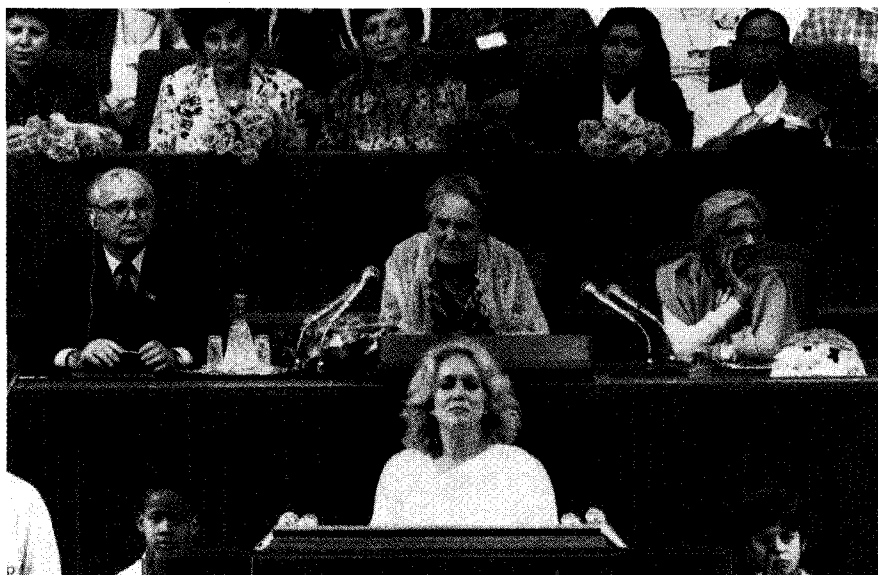
(She never calls him "your dad." It scares me. Call him "that bastard," I think.) "We'll teach him a lesson together."

We will hold hands and jump off the deck and fall. It can be no other way. I don't imagine anything else. I don't realize that if Mom really wanted to kill herself she would use Nembutal, the

and pure manipulation united. My survival is at stake and I will do anything. I need my mom. I cry into her long white nightgown. I feel her warm, fleshy arm through the soft silk. I say, "I don't want to die!"

She remains stiff. I am hyperaware of any signs or responses.

"I love you so much, Mom," I say.



Montandon with Mother Teresa in India, and addressing the 1987 World Congress of Women while Mikhail Gorbachev listens.

[*may*] want you to kill yourself with me. But it is a definite.

Now it's raining. The sky is opening. I had been looking forward to the next scene in "The Lord of the Rings." I have a whole small theological moment as I sit here. I think, Maybe I'll be able to read the rest of the book in the afterlife. Then I think, No, probably not. If I commit suicide, I'll go to Hell. There are no good books in Hell.

"No, Mom," I hear myself say. "I don't want to die. And I don't want you to die." I realize that I mean it. I feel it. I know it. I have only a few minutes to live, unless I can talk her out of it. This is not some melodrama.

"Let's talk about it, Sean. Let's talk about how we'll do it," Mom says now. She holds my hand. Her eyes look hard into mine. "How would *you* like to do it?" she asks.

"I don't want to do it, Mom," I say.

"Would you like to hold hands, so it won't be lonely?"

"No," I say.

"That'd show your dad," she says.

sleeping pill she's been taking ever since her heart surgery, thirty years ago, and has on hand in plentiful quantities; one bottle for mother and one for son, and then we'd lie down together in her bed.

No. In my mind, it is the deck. I imagine the loneliness I'll experience the moment she hurls herself over if I back out and don't go with her. It will be more horrible than jumping. Being there alone up in the sky, in the dark, with that huge empty apartment behind me, Mom falling down onto Russian Hill, white nightgown trailing behind her. Mom is attracted to and repelled by the deck. Its drama appeals to her: the beauty and power of falling into and smashing herself on a city that used to love her and now does not, taking with her the boy who used to love her and now does not.

I say, "I love you more than anybody, Mom."

I tell her I'm eleven and I want to be twelve. I feel a weird vertigo. I'm more calculating and more awfully truthful than I've ever been. I am pure emotion

She begins to stroke my back while I am crying. *Good*, I think.

Then, after a long silence, she simply says, resignation in her voice, "O.K., Sean."

It's true that Mom was born "dirt poor." That's why she felt entitled to be filthy rich. It explains and excuses a lot. She didn't want money because money was power; she wanted it because she'd been poor, and money cures poverty. But beauty is like money from God. And Mom had always been beautiful. Suddenly, she saw her beauty's true purpose: she would use it to save the world's children from nuclear annihilation.

In the fall of 1982, Mom, taking after her father, received a vision that altered the course of her life. She, too, considered it a message from God. And, as with her father, this vision required of her a great deal of itinerancy, with a great number of children.

She was in a "guided meditation" with Sheila Krystal, her Berkeley psychologist. She saw the earth being destroyed. This is how she describes it, in the still unpub-



"And do you take your organic green tea with sugar, lemon, honey, or just the usual dollop of smug self-righteousness?"

lished book she wrote about these years, "Whispers from God":

"My God, oh my God, there's been a nuclear explosion!" I gasped. "I'm seeing the annihilation of the earth . . . the seas are lava, boiling oceans, all the buildings are rubble . . . there's nothing left, people, animals, plants, trees, have all evaporated. Oh my God, my God," I wailed. "Why am I seeing this?"

"Open your eyes, Pat. It's okay."

"No, it isn't okay." I sobbed as the horrific vision continued to unfold.

"Oh," I persevered. "There are children standing in the debris, in gray ashes amid broken buildings, they're terrified, wailing. They're crying out that no one cared enough to stop this holocaust. They've lost everything, everyone. They are the only survivors. They . . . they . . . they're shouting, 'Why didn't you help us?'" My grief was piercing. What I had seen was authentic.

The day after Mom's vision, a man named Gerald Jampolsky came for tea and brought her a book, "Children as Teachers of Peace," that compiled kids' drawings and sayings about peace. Jampolsky asked if she could use her column (which Herb Caen had described as "a glittering feature that has broken new wind on the afternoon paper") to help him promote the book. Mom took this as another sign. She threw herself into the task. With great

speed, she put together a series of children's peace rallies in San Francisco, all culminating in the arrival of Jehan Sadat, the widow of Anwar Sadat, who was also involved with the book, and whom Mom always referred to, grandly, as "Madame Sadat of Egypt." When Mrs. Sadat arrived in San Francisco, they held a press conference together. At the press conference, Mom watched Mrs. Sadat closely. She was a handsome woman: regal, poised, full of dignity. Mom could do regal, she could do poised and dignified. She transformed herself from sexy society divorcée into widowed stateswoman.

Armistead Maupin, through one of his male characters in "Tales of the City," had this to say about it: "That stupid twat thinks she's Eleanor Roosevelt now."

Mom did not care. She had a mission. Though Mom had never taken any interest in the Cold War, now that she knew about it the Cold War had to end.

A San Francisco that I'd never encountered spilled into the penthouse. A man who played "music of the spheres" on special glass bowls came to

give a concert—and offered to sell his spheres to Mom. Mom put a wandering minstrel on retainer. She acquired a massive, horse-size, white satin Pegasus. Children's choirs sang on the staircase. When I described the scene to Dad, he said, "All these people are in your mom's court so they can take her money. Which is my money."

Mom organized a Saturday-morning concert downtown, in Union Square, at which she expected hundreds of kids to show up with "messages of peace for world leaders." Mom had advertised and promoted the event, had been in touch with schools all over the Bay Area, and a big turnout was assured. When the day arrived, there was a heavy rainstorm.

"There won't be a concert today, Sean," Mom said. "Maybe we should just go see a movie."

I imagined us coming home after the movie, Mom depressed, obliging me to crawl up on the bed with her and watch the raindrops streak down the windows.

With conviction, I said, "Mom, if even one kid shows up we have to be there."

Mom locked eyes with me. I held her gaze. She said, "You're right, Sean. We must go." She donned a designer raincoat, got her keys, got in the elevator, and prepared to roll down Russian Hill, up and over Nob Hill, to Union Square.

From "Whispers from God":

Hurrying up the steps to join my son in Union Square, I arrived just as a flash of lightning illuminated the scene. I stopped short, taken aback, dismayed by the number of wet bedraggled children waiting there. There were hundreds. Umbrellas of every color sheltered them as they, along with adult chaperones, attempted to keep dry in the deluge. . . . I was reminded of a scene from the film, *Our Town* in which the community gathers in a downpour to bury Emily.

I held open a bright-green canvas bag with a large red "P" on it, the first in a set of five bags that spelled out the word "PEACE." (Mom called them "the PEACE bags," and always kept at least one letter in the trunk of the car, along with an original Rodin sculpture she was trying to sell, "to fund my work.") Kids came up to me and put bundles of plastic-wrapped mail to Ronald Reagan and Yuri Andropov in the bag.

A blond girl asked, "What are you going to do with all the mail?"

Mom said, "We will send it on to the world leaders. I have their addresses."

"They'll just throw it away if you send it to them!" another kid said.

I saw confusion on Mom's face—*she hadn't thought of this.*

I said, "It's true, Mom. They'll throw them away." I sounded just like my father. She stared at me; other kids had gathered around. Mom would blame this on me. Not herself. Not these other kids. *I was betraying her, showing my allegiance to Dad—and so, with the word "away" still in my mouth, I said, "We have to take them!"*

There was a moment of silence. And then Mom declared, with the children gathered around her, "*We will take them. We will carry your messages of peace to the world leaders.*"

I hadn't suggested taking the mail because I believed it would work. Without giving it much thought, standing there in the rain, it seemed to me that the mission of delivering children's messages of peace to the political leaders of the world was a vast one that would distract Mom for some time, and almost certainly for the rest of the day.

I have always, always underestimated my mother.

In twelve days, Mom arranged to deliver the mail to Washington, Rome, Moscow, and Cairo. She gathered children. Children of all races. Naturally, I was one of them.

She had huge buttons printed up that said "CHILDREN AS TEACHERS OF PEACE." She ordered unwearably dorky T-shirts that matched the buttons. She designed a purple banner emblazoned with "Children as Teachers of Peace" and hands with flags on them, reaching for a heart. She paid for studio time to record two peace songs: the groovy, folksy "Room for You and Me" and the "We Are the World"-like "Children as Teachers of Peace." She hired a documentary-film crew to follow her around and chronicle these historic events.

We left on the first peace trip on Christmas Day, 1982. The plan was to go first to Washington, D.C., and present a bag of mail to President Reagan. Then we'd go on to Rome and meet the Pope. Then Russia and Andropov. And, finally, Egypt, where

we would be welcomed by Mrs. Sadat.

Mom had assembled her multi-ethnic group of kids by placing ads in the paper and calling on friends. We were: Rachel Skiffer, eight and black and precocious; Raquel Bennett, twelve and Jewish and more precocious; my cousin Patrick, who had discovered he was a Republican and acted like Michael J. Fox on "Family Ties"; Matt Nolan, a freckly blond Dennis the Menace-resembling kid; Jonathan Dearman, black, fifteen, a varsity football player, idolized by Matt, hilarious and sarcastic and sincere; and me.

Thanks to Karna Small, a White House publicist and a longtime acquaintance of Mom's, Reagan was supposed to meet with us. But when we arrived there was no meeting. We stood outside the gates of the White House and unfurled the banner. Mom told me and Rachel Skiffer to form a biracial delegation and beg the security guard to let us in.

When the guard said, "Sorry, kids, President's busy, and I can't take anything for him," Mom jumped in and said, "You should be ashamed of yourself! We're going to tell the press that President Reagan doesn't care about children! It's *shameful*. Don't you think that's shameful? That the President doesn't want to see the children of his country? The press will think so."

He said, "I'm sorry."

"You should be sorry. Don't you have children?" She was wearing a huge fur-trimmed hat with a burgundy felt top. It looked like a sea urchin.

He said, "I'm not gonna talk about my kids with you, lady."

Mom said, in a voice of great empathy, "What are their names?," her head angled to the side in its sea-urchin hat, his face only a foot away.

He slid closed a Plexiglas door and locked himself inside his closet-size guard booth.

I thought, Mom's going to get suicidal now for sure.

But she didn't. Instead, she told us to meditate on our mission. Mission meditations involved visualizing ourselves in a circle of light. Then Mom would tell us to place another circle of light in front of and just touching our own, "forming a figure eight," and bring into it whatever world leader we wanted to see. She always used their full titles, and placed emphasis on the more exotic countries and names: "His Holiness Pope John Paul II"; "Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin"; "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev"; "Premier of the People's Republic of China,



"Your 5 A.M. is here."

Zhao Ziyang"; "Chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Kohl"; "Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi"; "Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi"—all of whom we would, in fact, eventually meet.

After our defeat with Ronald Reagan, we put the Pope in the second circle.

"See him in your circle of light blessing our mission," Mom said. "Visualize front-row seats." She had arranged, with the help of a Catholic priest friend, who also used to have a hit Bay Area television show, for us to attend a medium-sized public audience with the Pope.

We flew to Rome the next day. Mom went to pick up our Pope tickets at a convent near the Vatican. It turned out that we had a block of front-row seats and some more midway back, but on the main aisle.

Our audience, the next morning, was in a modern building adjacent to St. Peter's. Outside, we waited behind barricades for an hour staring at the Swiss Guards. They looked like clowns with swords.

"What the hell could they do?" I said to Jonathan Dearman, whom I was trying to impress. At fifteen, Jonathan was the oldest. And he was one of the only black students at the same Catholic high school my dad had gone to.

He said, "They're like ninjas. They can stop bullets with their swords. You could unload a whole Uzi at one of those guys and they'd be fine. And if you even got *near* the Pope"—he assumed a karate stance and uttered a drawn-out, badass "Hoooooooooooo-aaaaaaaaahhh . . ."

Around us everyone was singing. There was a joyous throng of people who had been waiting all their lives for this. Africans. South Americans. Italians. Irish. Eastern Europeans. We were let into a Quonset-roofed building with an elliptical stained-glass window taking up the entirety of one end.

I walked toward a golden throne, until I arrived at the front row. There was so much crowd noise that it filled my ears and felt like it was creeping down my throat. Rachel Skiffer ignored everything and read "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret."

Our row filled up and steel barriers were locked into place at either end. Three-foot-tall wooden platforms were set up at regular intervals along the center aisle. People pressed against the barriers

and leaned out. Mom, ten rows back, wore a white dress, to match the Pope, and a tightly wrapped coral-colored head scarf. It made her look like a piece of reef. Schools of nuns and priests, all in light-blue and black outfits, darted through.

And then came the Pope himself! He was all in white, with an entourage of men in black. When they made their entrance at the back of the main aisle, the Pope in the center, like a boxer surrounded by trainers, the ocean started *boiling*. People knelt, stood on their toes on kneelers, cried out. The scene came together into a huge adulatory crash.

The Pope walked down the aisle toward the throne. In his long white garments and with his red face, he looked like a butcher. He climbed each of the platforms in turn, a man holding each of his hands, then turned to either side of the hall, so that the entire congregation could witness him. The men in black

collected gifts, passed them to the rear, and received new ones, like a bucket brigade in reverse.

At home on the nightstand next to my bed I had a framed picture of the Pope. Dad had given it to me. As the Pope drew closer, I thought about how impressed Dad would be if I actually got to meet him, if we had a conversation, if he laid his hands on me, if we became friends and he decided to be my advocate, if I was tying up the phone one evening and Dad asked who I was talking to, annoyed, and I said, "Karol," and he furrowed his brow as I handed him the phone, and he said, "*Caro!*," and the Pope's Polish Darth Vader voice said, "Yays. Karol Wojtyla. Bayter known to you, my soan, es Johannes Paulus Secundus, speaking."

I'd grab another extension and say, "The Pope."

"*Tak*," the Pope would say in Polish, fondness in his voice.

DEEPEST REMAINS

What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious panics
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what deepest remains?
—Walt Whitman

1.
In my early years, I spoke in many languages.
Then I grew quiet.

(This is not an obituary.)

Some of my dreams faded,
if they could count as dreams.

I was a good friend,
though I mostly called
when there was no one else.

I was a poet,
though I only wrote
when there was nothing else.
(That was often enough.)

2.
I was truly in love once, at least as I remember it.

A boy from another country said,
I intend to go alone,
which was not what I intended.

I learned to sleep in a hammock,

my body sagging to the floor.

I bathed in the river fully clothed:
the cotton clung, translucent.
(A man watched from the outer banks.)

I spent the night on an ancient pyramid,
monkeys shrieking through the trees.

I bribed a guard to leave me alone,
and there was no one left to tell.

3.
A young man skipped ahead on the trail.
I must have said, *Wait*.
(Years passed.)
How could I say goodbye?

I sealed leftovers in ziplock bags;
I wore a flowered bathrobe.

I began to listen to books on tape,
especially biography.

(This is not an obituary.)

There was a jungle-book ending:
strands of dirty-blond light
shone through the spreading palms.

—Lexi Rudnitsky
(1972-2005)

"Vicar of Christ. Bishop of Rome.
The Holy Father, Dad," I'd say.

"*Tak, tak*. Eet ees very spacyial young
men thayt you hev there," the Pope
would say. "Eet ees a very great sadness
for me, aynd for God, that you do not
understand the value oav him."

What really happened was that the
Pope ascended the steps and sat
on his throne, and a man read a roster of
delegations present at the audience.
When the name Children as Teachers of
Peace was announced, the Pope raised his
arm and shook it approvingly. Then, after
the service, when I thought the whole
thing was over, and Dad would never be
impressed, the Pope suddenly came down,
took Rachel's chin in his hand while "Are
You There God? It's Me, Margaret" sat on
the pew behind her, gave her a kiss on the
head, looked at all of us, looked at Matt,
and said, "Irish?"

A woman with a brogue shouted,
"Everybody from Galway sends you
their love, Holy Father!"

I was leaning out so far I almost lost
my balance. I said, "*No*."

He looked as if this information were
disappointing to him.

Matt said, "Um. American."

The Pope said, "American!"

The Pope grasped one of our head-
size buttons, with Mom's big green block
letters on it, and read out, very slowly,
"*Cheeldrenteachers*."

"Galway, Holy Father!" the woman
shouted.

"*Peez*," said the Pope.

Then he came and stood in front of
me, everyone's eyes following. I handed
him my pile of mail. He looked me in
the eye and said, "Thank you. I em very
grateful to you and all your *fraynds*." He
looked at me hard. "Uhh, so meny,"
he said.

"*Yeab*," I said.

"God blays avery wone of you, your
families aynd your *fraynds*."

He looked at me hard again on
"friends." I thought, *Like we're friends!*

"Thank you," I said, and gave him a
smile that said, *Dude!*

"Thank you, Your Highness," my
cousin said.

"Veery, veery welcome," he said to me.

Then he put his hand on my shoul-
der and just stood there talking to the
Irish lady from Galway. His robes were
all around me. It was a whiteout. I
soaked in the starch against my face. I
thought I could hide in those robes and
go with him. And then he was gone,
the steel barriers were removed, and we
filed out.

When I told Mom what had hap-
pened, she said *she'd* sent the Pope to me.

He'd been coming down the aisle,
getting up on the observation plat-
forms, stopping at every tenth row or
so, and then Mom, who'd been medi-
tating so hard on this moment, was re-
warded. "I knew he would come to me,"
she said. "I just knew it. He singled me
out like a laser. He told me, 'You are
doing God's work.' And when he tried
to walk away I tugged his sleeve and
said, 'Please go to the children—they're
in the front row.'"

Our Aeroflot flight landed in Moscow
the next afternoon, with the light al-
ready gone. An Intourist guide named Val
met and obviously disliked us. We stayed
in a vast hotel called the Kosmos, which
curved like a sickle, and had been built for
the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

The next morning, we met Val for a
tour of Red Square, followed by a meeting
at the headquarters of the Soviet Peace
Committee, an entity for which he had a
cynical smile. All I knew about Russia
was that the women were unattractive and
the men were unhappy, and bent on mak-
ing the rest of the world unhappy by tak-
ing away our material comforts.

The Peace Committee building, on
Prospekt Mira, was big, impressive, set
on a corner, with the word for peace
(*mir*) written on its façade in many dif-
ferent languages. We were shown into a
large wood-panelled room where a pol-
ished U-shaped meeting table was set
with glasses and bottles of water. The
whole scene reminded me of Mom: a

great show, but, considering we'd never heard of it before, probably important only to itself—powerless.

We sat down along the bottom of the U. A quartet of Peace Committee representatives, a woman and three men, attempting to look cheery but looking mostly boiled, deprived of essential vitamins, and underrested, occupied the arm to our left, while on the right were four attractive Soviet children. All the Russian adults seemed to want sleep and cigarettes simultaneously.

Mom, wearing her sea-urchin hat, brandished the "Children as Teachers of Peace" book and said, "Peace is different things to different *people*. For some, peace is, as they say, 'Grandma's homemade bread.' But *never* is peace *war*. *Never*."

Then she had us tell the Russians what peace meant to us. I said, junior-diplomat style, "I think that we're all on this mission to make the Soviet Union and the United States realize that their people are really the same, so that they can get along better and bring the two nations closer together." Rachel blew me away with "I think peace is something that everybody should have. Not just people but animals. It's just—peaceful."

Everyone laughed. There was some chatter. We had a little back-and-forth with the Soviet kids.

The main Peace Committee representative said, "Are they also from all over the country here that you've brought or are they from the eh . . . Bay Area?"

"They are from the Bay Area and Houston, Texas, and also New York City," Mom said.

He said, "Excellent."

"There were many, many more than this, but it was impossible to bring them. And we do hope to send them. In fact, not only do we hope—we will send them."

"Do you mean that eh . . . there are such eh . . . well, since you're not an organization but a movement as children as teachers of peace but eh . . . they have them in New York, in Houston, as well as San Francisco?"

"It's beginning to move that way. We're finding that as we go across the country that more and more people want to be involved in this. It's a pro movement, it's not anti. It's *pro* peace. We are *for* peace. We—

all of us—are the snowflakes that go to make up the snowball that will create the avalanche for peace."

The man smiled and said, "It's important that we shouldn't be melted!"

Mom replied, "That's right!" Then she told him we would deliver the mail only to the Kremlin, rather than leave it with the Peace Committee, as they seemed to expect. Taken aback, the man stammered, "I will ask to, eh, arrange something to give you a chance to meet somebody higher up."

Mom said, "Thank you. Thank you for your work on behalf of peace. We love you for it. We appreciate you for it. So we give you our hearts and we hope to give someone our mail."

On our tour bus, Mom called an impromptu meditation.

She said, "Picture us being received in the Kremlin. Picture Mr. Andropov accepting the mail. Reading the mail." We all closed our eyes and breathed in the bus fumes. When we opened them, Val said, "Eet weel note heppen." He scoffed. "You will not be invited to Kremlin. No one is invited to Kremlin."

"I see it happening. It will happen. I believe in miracles," Mom said. "Why are you so negative, Val?"

The next morning, we drove through a guarded gate to the Kremlin.

"I promised you a miracle, Val," Mom said as we passed through clean and beautifully cobbled streets in the private part of the fortress. "Here it is. *Ta-da!*"

Val was silent, better dressed than usual, not smoking.

We pulled up to a large yellow stone building, entered through a side door, checked our coats, and then, four at a time, ascended to an upper floor in a private elevator, which was quiet, wood-paneled, and red-carpeted. Henry Kissinger had ridden in this elevator.

When everyone had arrived, a man led us down a wide, silent corridor. He hurried. Red carpet ran up stairs and around corners. A few hundred feet of hallway later, we stepped through a door and into a room full of black-suited men. Several poles of television lights lit up—*whoomp!* Shutters were released and flashbulbs popped.

Mom smiled and smiled and then

turned to Val and without breaking the smile said, "Val, are you the same person who told us we were crazy? That we would never be received in the Kremlin?"

More shutters. Val, also barely moving his mouth, said, "Eye doan't believe eet."

"Believe it, Val," Mom said. "It's happening."

A valet in a gray suit led us into a panelled room of cool magnificence, with a connecting door to the chambers of the Supreme Soviet. Floor-to-ceiling windows with thick white drapes looked out over wooded Kremlin grounds. The muzzled press followed us in and set up their television and radio equipment on the far side of the room, near the windows.

Mom said, "Oh, how pretty! How nice! How nice to see everybody. Where should we go?"

The valet in gray said, "Please," and indicated a solid, very red man, with lank, fluorescent-white hair, wearing silver sunglasses with yellow lenses: this was the chairman of the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., Vitaly Petrovich Ruben.

Ruben bellowed in Russian, "Welcome, American children, to Mordor—also known as the *Kremlin!* Recent home of *Stalin!* Lord of the dread Nazgûl. Also, Sauron, who will awaken again to glory some black day—presently he sleeps below, in Red Square, in his dread mausoleum! Have you seen it?"

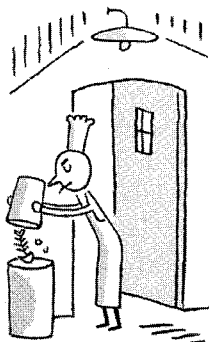
A young translator with splotchy skin and a nasal voice translated, simply, "We are glad to welcome you here in Kremlin."

Mom stared at the translator for a second before she realized he was finished. She said, "Thank you."

Ruben spoke more Russian. Mom smiled. "And I'd also like to meet my young friends! Please."

Mom said, "Yes, yes, let me get out of the way!"

Ruben went to Rachel, bent over, and said, "I would be glad to shake your hand!" Then he shook all of our hands, looked at the banner, and said, "The poster is very expressive!" Cameras flashed. The translator continued madly translating. "I understand it as expressing the desire of all the peoples on earth to live in *peace*." More cameras clicked and



flashed. "Now I may invite you, my dear friends, to be seated at the table."

Reporters, aides, Ruben, underlings, kids—we all sat around a gleaming, refreshment-laden conference table. At six places were red, intricately detailed, Kremlin-shaped boxes containing Soviet chocolates (chalky, unmeltable).

Mom said, "I can see that you're very good with children!"

Ruben shrugged and removed his sunglasses. A grandfather clock chimed. Mom looked up in wonder and said, "Oh, how beautiful—" But Ruben cut her off. He began speaking without pause, blinking frequently.

"Dear Mrs. Montandon, and my dear young guests, my friends, the children of the United States of America. I am glad to welcome you here in my office. In this study as well as in the Kremlin Palace, I have had meetings with American senators. In particular, it was in 1975 when I met with a delegation led by the late Senator Humphrey and Senator Hugh Scott, and during those meetings we have talked about peace. And I must be frank to say that at that time the atmosphere for such a talk was more favorable than it is now, when I'm having the privilege to meet the future of America, American children."

I looked out the window. There was a big cathedral out there. Where is Mount Doom? I wondered. I must sneak away from this meeting and find it. I will throw the ring into its fiery depths. I will ask to use the bathroom . . .

The translator kept translating: "It is sometimes claimed that in the Soviet Union a sort of a Russification is under way with regard to all of the population. I will try to show you whether it's true or not on the example of my own family. I am a Latvian. My wife is Russian. My junior grandson"—Vitaly Petrovich Ruben, Jr.—"is studying at a secondary school in Riga. All teaching in that school is in English, but children also study the Latvian and Russian languages. As of today, my grandson already has a perfect knowledge of Russian, Latvian, and English." Ruben paused, gestured "no" with a wagging index finger, then held up three fingers. "But he is not content with a command of only three languages! For a year already he has been studying Italian in an optional course. . . . Dear young American friends—we Latvians have a



saying. A saying which has it that you are as many times a man as many languages you know."

Mom, in a Southern-belle voice, said, "My."

Ruben was at the head of the table. In front of him were two phones, one a rotary, the other some sort of special push-button in case he needed to call in MIGs, or a missile strike. There was also a Fabergé-style clock: a good place, I thought, to keep nuclear launch codes. If Ruben and one of his valets were to spin the two fancy pens in the pen holder next to the clock, in synchronicity, then maybe the clock would open and . . .

Ruben continued his speech: "I have talked about it with Senators Humphrey and Scott. At this very table I have told this to Senator Cranston and Mr. Mondale and other responsible and well-known Americans who are in charge of

insuring the security of the American people and other peoples on earth—who are responsible for the destiny of all mankind! To my profound regret, I must admit that so far those talks, the dialogue that we've had and my attempts to convince them of our sincere desire for peace, have been fruitless."

His voice grew grave and entreating. "My dear young friends, American children, I can assure you, I'd like to assure you in all sincerity that the Soviet Union will never start a war against anybody who does not attack it."

I was completely convinced.

Mom gazed at Ruben with rapt, devouring attention.

Ruben smiled, gestured wildly. "So please believe I'll be very glad to accept your letters to Comrade Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov and I shall hand them over to him and we shall consider those



"I find in these cases that the best defense is a pack of lies."

letters as the most serious and most sincere expression of your desire to live in peace and to cooperate peacefully with us!"

The grandfather clock chimed.

I wondered, Why do we have all these missiles pointed at this country of chocolate Kremfins? I felt sure that Dad would have a hard time explaining. I would nail him on this point.

Eventually, Ruben said, "I would like to conclude my statement. I'm not quite sure, though, if I have managed to make my message clear to you that the Soviet people seek friendship, peace, and cooperation with all the peoples on earth and in particular among them with the people—or it would be even more precise to say the peoples—of the United States!"

I thought, It's totally clear! And this is good news!

"Did I make it quite clear to you?"

We all hollered, "Yes!"

Mom said, "Thank you, thank you very much, Chairman Ruben. We come to you with love, pure innocence, and caring about all the children of the world."

The translator translated.

"I think it was *appropriate* that when we walked in the clock was chiming. Because we feel we're working under the stress of time for peace and there isn't that much time left for any of us unless we *actively* achieve peace and work at it. Perhaps the most simple way of express-

ing ourselves is sometimes the most effective. And the children, *Children as Teachers of Peace*, have a clarity of vision without *ego*, without the *façade* we all build in order to get through life."

The translator translated. Ruben nodded, frowned, pointed to Mom, and said, "I very much agree with you."

"Ah, I'm so glad!" Mom said.

Smiles were exchanged. Then Mom said slowly, pausing for translation, "I think it's best now if I let each child present you with a token letter. They speak much better than I do. Rachel Skiffer, who is eight years old, present Chairman Ruben with your—"

Before Mom could finish, Rachel, brandishing a big piece of construction paper, blurted out, "Kiss and make up. To Mr. Andropov and Mr. Reagan." Then she added, "Read by Rachel," and thrust the drawing at Ruben.

Mom said solemnly, "*Kiss and make up.*"

Ruben, pointing at Rachel, said, "Mr. Andropov is ready to do that and Mr. Reagan should also get ready!"

Rachel dumped out her sack on a table. Mom said, "Now, I must tell you something very funny. We've been travelling since December 25th at seven-fifteen in the morning. And in taking mail for President Reagan, for Pope Paul, for the President of Egypt, as well as

Mr. Andropov, some of it has gotten mixed up. So you may get a letter or two for President Reagan and he may get a letter or two for Mr. Andropov."

Laughter from the press. Ruben laughed, too, and said, "I'll send them over to him."

Then Mom was hit with the inspiration for a line she would wind up saying to half the leaders of the world: "And that may be a very good thing, to read each other's mail!"

When the translation came, everyone was delighted. Ruben guffawed. Reporters scribbled. I stood up in this atmosphere of bonhomie and presented Chairman Ruben with a drawing, telling him, "Peace is helping."

Chopping the air with his hand, he bellowed back at me, "That's quite true! A *perfect* truth and an *eternal* truth!"

Mom said, "If we may, Chairman Ruben, we would like to light a candle for peace. We carry them with us for this purpose."

Ruben said, "I will be grateful to you. It is noble to cast light into the world."

Jonathan Dearman lit a votive candle in an ashtray on Ruben's desk and said, "I'm lighting this candle to unite the leaders and adults of our countries, hoping they can see with our eyes. The children are already united."

Ruben said, "Thank you for coming. Your visit gives us hope."

After this, we were greeted by banks of press wherever we went. Everything we did was a news story, broadcast throughout the Soviet Union. Clattering newsreel cameras and sixties-looking television equipment recorded our every move. We were taken to a winter carnival, given horse-drawn-sleigh rides and vodka. Mom strode valiantly through the snow, in sumptuous designer boots trimmed with fur and leather, her own film crew racing ahead of her, banner unfurled behind, looking like a revolutionary icon come to life in a fashion shoot. There was brief confusion when she stepped off the path and grabbed two small children, bundled in huge down coats. Mom snatched them away from their mother and continued walking proudly, with each of them holding one of her hands, the mother chasing after, increasingly concerned (but out of the frame), the children unable to resist the thrill of it all, the lights and cameras and

this blond American movie star, who was now saying to all the Russian children, to the TV and radio people, to the reporters from Tass and *Pravda*, to her own documentary film crew, "I love you! I love you! I love you!" shouting it, getting Soviet kids to take up the call, making all of us do it, too, throwing the words like flowers into the crowd: "I love you! I love you! I love you!" She asked Val how to say "I love you" in Russian.

"*Ya lyublyu vas*," he said. Then Mom cried out, as loudly as she could, full of joy, "Yellow blue bus! Yellow blue bus! Yellow blue bus!"—to the left, to the right, directly at the cameras. Delighted, like a child, like a star, she took a bouquet of flowers and, in a huge chorus of "I love you"s, ascended into the bus, hugging, kissing, kissing, kissing, throwing kisses everywhere, letting go of the children, whose mother ran to retrieve them.

This scene, on Soviet television that night, became a refrain. It was like coming home for Mom. Coming home to the sixties. Coming home to fan clubs and adulation. Coming home to her childhood of church and siblings, too. She made it happen over and over: in Moscow, in Beijing, in Paris, in Delhi, in Cairo just a few days later, pinning buttons onto the rags of street kids, walking with a throng of more button-wanting kids, who begged and screamed "I love you!" in Arabic, and it always filled me with anxious amazement to see my mother plunging into crowds of children, drinking up their love.

Back in San Francisco, Mom was no less mercurial and unhappy. She could be warm and embracing and outgoing to an extreme, and to that same extreme she could be cold and haughty and imperious. In 1986, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Informed of this by a man she'd met in Hiroshima who was close to members of the Nobel committee, she worked hard to get the nomination seconded by a number of politicians in the United States. She was convinced she'd win. "I will win the Nobel Peace Prize, Sean. Someone has to win it. Why not me?" she said. "It will be a wonderful affirmation for our work." A friend even gave her an executive desk bauble, a glass pyramid with the words "Pat Montandon Oslo 1986" suspended in its crystal

depths. When it was announced that Elie Wiesel had won, Mom hurled the pyramid at a mirror. It bounced off and hit my leg. I picked it up. Cracked at its heart. Mom locked herself in her room, pulled all the drapes, and ate ice cream. I got her a silver cup at a trophy store and wrote the words "A. Nobel Mom Prize" on it in paint pen.

I imagined calling the Nobel committee and saying, "Please give your award to Mom and save my ass."

But I also felt that what she was doing was sincere and moving; and when she was doing it she gave me the best experiences of my childhood. After the Nobel tantrum, Mom held an international contest to award a children's peace prize to outstanding kids from seventeen countries, then got their governments to fly them to San Francisco, paying for the travel with money taken from their defense budgets. She got the Soviet government to send a Russian girl on a "peace tour" of the United States. The girl, Katya Lycheva, met with Reagan in the White House, in what Dad called "your mom's best stunt." Shortly thereafter, Gorbachev invited Mom to give a peace speech in the Supreme Soviet.

Dad and I both thought peace was a passing fancy, but we were wrong. Mom left her penthouse and adopted city behind—but she has never given

up on taking children around the world for peace. Before leaving San Francisco, she even made friends with Herb Caen and Armistead Maupin, invited each man to dinner, and told them she loved them. Right now, in her seventies, she's on her thirty-fifth peace trip, in Beslan, Russia, helping children who survived the school siege to make a banner memorializing their friends who were killed. I got an e-mail recently that read:

Dearest Sean:

I am in Beslan and it is very emotional and unbelievable as well. Lots, lots to tell you.

I hope all is well. Everything is unbelievably sad here but the banner is being made. We have all photos available to us tomorrow. Guards, police escorts.

I love you.
Mom

Back in January of 1983, upon our triumphant return from that first peace trip, Mom was photographed in front of a black backdrop surrounded by a group of twenty multi-ethnic kids, all of them wearing black and holding up their hands making peace signs. In the printed photo, you see darkness with lots of smiling, rainbow-complected faces and peace signs and Mom's radiant smile, halo of hair, her lightning-strike zigzag of a commanding, broken nose, and her resolute jaw, shining out at you. ♦

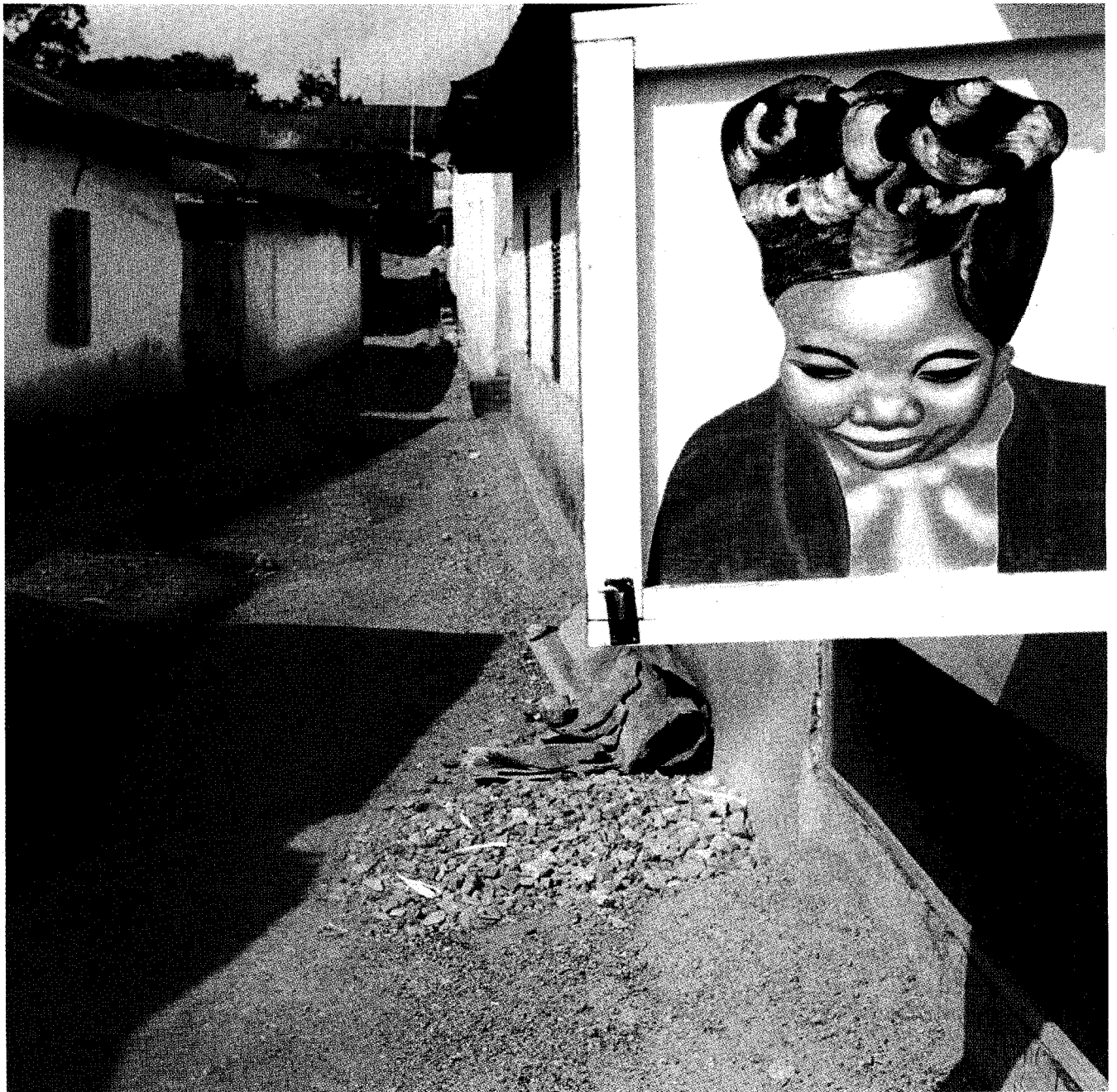


"They're harmless when they're alone, but get a bunch of them together with a research grant and watch out."

FICTION

MALLAM SILE

BY MOHAMMED NASEEHU ALI



He was popularly known as *mai tea*, or the tea seller. His shop was situated right in the navel of Zongo Street—a stone's throw from the chief's assembly shed and adjacent to the kiosk where Mansa BBC, the town gossip, sold her provisions. Along with fried eggs and white butter bread, Mallam Sile carried all kinds of beverages: regular black tea, Japanese green tea, Milo, Bournvita, cocoa drink, instant coffee. But on Zongo Street all hot beverages were referred to just as tea, and it was common, therefore, to hear people say, "Mallam Sile, may I have a mug of cocoa tea?" or "Sile, may I have a cup of coffee tea?"

The tea shop had no windows. It was built of *warwa*, a cheap wood easily infested by termites. The floor was uncemented, and heaps of dust rose in the air whenever a customer walked in. Sile protected his merchandise from the dust by keeping everything in plastic bags. An enormous wooden "chop box," the top of which he used as a serving table, covered most of the space in the shop. There was a tall chair behind the chop box for Sile, but he never used it, preferring instead to stand on his feet even when the shop was empty. There were also three benches that were meant to be used only by those who bought tea, though the idle gossips who crowded the shop and never spent any money occupied the seats most of the time.

Old Sile had an irrational fear of being electrocuted and so he'd never tapped electricity into his shack, as was usually done on Zongo Street. Instead, he used kerosene lanterns, three of which hung from the low wooden ceiling. Sile kept a small radio in the shop, and whenever he had no customers he listened, in meditative silence, to the English programs on GBC 2, as though he understood what was being said. Mallam Sile was fluent only in his northern Sisaala tongue, though he understood Hausa—the language of the street's inhabitants—and spoke just enough pidgin to be able to conduct his business.

The mornings were usually slow for the tea seller, as a majority of the street folks preferred the traditional breakfast of *kóko da mǎsa*, or corn porridge with rice cake. But, come evening, the shop was crowded with the street's young men and women, who gossiped and talked about

the "laytes' neus" in town. Some came to the shop just to meet their loved ones. During the shop's peak hours—from eight in the evening until around midnight—one could hardly hear oneself talk because of the boisterous chattering that went on. But anytime Mallam Sile opened his mouth to add to a conversation people would say, "Shut up, Sile, what do you know about this?" or "Close your beak, Sile, who told you that?" The tea seller learned to swallow his words, and eventually spoke only when he was engaged in a transaction with a customer. But nothing said or even whispered in the shop escaped his sharp ears.

Mallam Sile was a loner, without kin on the street or anywhere else in the city. He was born in Nanpugu, a small border town in the north. He left home at age sixteen, and, all by himself, journeyed more than nine hundred miles in a cow truck to find work down south in Kumasi—the capital city of Ghana's gold-rich Ashanti region.

Within a week of his arrival in the city, Sile landed a job as a house servant. Although his monthly wages were meagre, he sent a portion of them home to his ailing parents, who lived like paupers in their drought-stricken village. Even so, Sile's efforts were not enough to save his parents from the claws of Death, who took them away in their sleep one night. They were found clinging tightly to each other, as if one of them had seen what was coming and had grabbed onto the other so that they could go together.

The young Sile received the news of his parents' death with mixed emotions. He was sad to lose them, of course, but he saw it as a well-deserved rest for them, as they both had been ill and bedridden for many months. Though Sile didn't travel up north to attend their funeral, he sent money for a decent burial. With his parents deceased, Sile suddenly found himself with more money in his hands. He quit his house-servant job and found another, selling iced *kenkey* in Kumasi's central market. Sile kept every pesewa he earned, and two years later he was able to use his savings to open a tea business. It was the first of such establishments on Zongo Street, and would remain the only one for many years to come.

Mallam Sile was short—so short, in fact, that many claimed he was a Pygmy. He stood exactly five feet one inch tall. Although he didn't have the broad, flat nose, poorly developed chin, and round head of the Pygmies, he was stout and hairy all over, as they were. A childhood illness that had caused Sile's vision to deteriorate had continued to plague him throughout his adult life. Yet he refused to go to the hospital and condemned any form of medication, traditional or Western. "God is the one who brings illness, and he is the only true healer"—this was Sile's simple, if rather mystical, explanation.

Sile's small face was covered with a thick, long beard. The wrinkles on his dark forehead and the moistness of his soft, squinted eyes gave him the appearance of a sage, one who had lived through and conquered many adversities in his life. His smile, which stretched from one wrinkled cheek to the other, baring his kola-stained teeth, radiated strength, wisdom, and self-confidence.

Sile wore the same outfit every day: a white polyester djellabah and its matching *wando*, a loose pair of slacks that tied with strings at the waist. He had eight of these suits, and wore a different one each day of the week. Also, his head was perpetually shaved, and he was never without his white embroidered Mecca hat—worn by highly devout Muslims as a reflection of their submission to Allah. Like most of the street's dwellers, Sile owned just one pair of slippers at a time, and replaced them only when they were worn out beyond repair. An unusual birth defect that caused the tea seller to grow an additional toe on each foot had made it impossible for him to find footwear that fit him properly; special slippers were made for him by Anaba the cobbler, who used discarded car tires for the soles of the shoes he made. The rascals of Zongo Street, led by Samadu, the street's most notorious bully, poked at Sile's feet and his slippers, which they called *kalabikwala*, a nonsensical term that no one could understand, let alone translate.

At forty-six, Mallam Sile was still a virgin. He routinely made passes at the divorcées and widows who came to his shop, but none showed any interest in him whatsoever. "What would I

do with a dwarf?" the women would ask, feeling ashamed of having had passes made at them by Sile. A couple of them seemed receptive to tea seller Sile's advances, but everyone knew that they were flirting with him only in order to get free tea.

Eventually, Sile resigned himself to his lack of success with women. He was convinced that he would die a virgin. Yet late at night, after all the customers, idlers, and rumormongers had left the shop to seek refuge in their shanties and on their bug-ridden grass mattresses, Sile could be heard singing love songs, hoping that a woman somewhere would respond to his passionate cries:

A beautiful woman, they say,
Is like an elephant's meat.
And only the man with the sharpest knife
Can cut through.
That's what they say.

Young girl, I have no knife,
I am not a hunter of meat,
And I am not savage.
I am only looking for love.
This is what I say.

Up north where I am from,
Young girls are not what they are here.
Up north where I am from,
People don't judge you by your knife.
They look at the size of your heart.

Young girl, I don't know what you look like.
I don't know where to look for you.
I don't even know who you are, young girl.
All I know is: my heart is aching.
Oh, oh, oh! My heart is aching for you.

Sile's voice rang with melancholy when he sang his songs. But still the rascals derided him. "When are you going to give up, Sile?" they would say. "Can't you see that no woman would marry you?"

"I have given up on them long, long ago," he would reply. "But I am never going to give up on myself!"

"You keep fooling yourself," they told him, laughing.

The rascals' mocking didn't end there. Knowing that Mallam Sile couldn't see properly, they often used fake or banned cedi notes to purchase tea from him at night. The tea seller pinned the useless bills to the walls of his shop as if they were good-luck charms. He believed that it was hunger—and not mischief—that had led the rascals to cheat him. And, since he considered it inhuman to refuse a hungry person food, Mal-

MY NAME

One night when the lawn was a golden green and the marbled moonlit trees rose like fresh memorials in the scented air, and the whole countryside pulsed with the chirr and murmur of insects, I lay in the grass feeling the great distances open above me, and wondered what I would become—and where I would find myself—and though I barely existed, I felt for an instant that the vast star-clustered sky was mine, and I heard my name as if for the first time, heard it the way one hears the wind or the rain, but faint and far off as though it belonged not to me but to the silence from which it had come and to which it would go.

—Mark Strand

lam Sile allowed them to get away with their frauds.

To cool off the hot tea for his customers, Sile poured the contents of one mug into another, raising one over the other. The rascals would push Sile in the middle of this process, causing the hot liquid to spill all over his arms. The tea seller was never angered by such pranks. He merely grinned and, without saying a word, wiped off the spilled tea and continued to serve his customers. And when the rascals blew out the lanterns in the shop, so as to steal bread and Milo while he was trying to rekindle the light, Sile accepted that, too. He managed to rid his heart of any ill feelings. He would wave his short arms to anyone who walked past his shop, and shout, by way of greeting, "How are the heavens with you, boy?" Sile called everyone "boy," including women and older people, and he hardly ever uttered a sentence without referring to the heavens.

He prided himself on his hard work, and smiled whenever he looked in the mirror and saw his dwarfish body and ailing eyes, two abnormalities that he had learned to love. A few months before the death of his parents, he had come to the conclusion that if Allah had made him any differently he would not have been Mallam Sile—and Mallam Sile was an individual whom Sile's heart, mind, and spirit had come to accept and respect. This created within him a peace that made it possible for him not only to tolerate the rascals' ill

treatment but also to forgive them. Though in their eyes Sile was only a buffoon.

One sunny afternoon during the dry season, Mallam Sile was seen atop the roof of his shack with hammers, saws, pliers, and all kinds of building tools. He lingered there all day long like a stray monkey, and by dusk he had dismantled all the aluminum roofing sheets that had once sheltered him and his business. He resumed work early the following morning, and by about one-thirty, before *azafar*, the first of the two afternoon prayers, Sile had no place to call either home or tea shop—he had demolished the shack down to its dusty floor.

At three-thirty, after *la-asar*, the second afternoon worship, Mallam Sile moved his personal belongings and all his tea paraphernalia to a room in the servants' quarters of the chief's palace. The room had been arranged for him by the chief's wazir, or right-hand man, who was sympathetic to the tea seller.

During the next two days, Mallam Sile ordered plywood and planks of *odum*, a wood superior to the *warwa* used for the old shop. He also ordered a few bags of cement and truckloads of sand and stones, and immediately began building a new shack, much bigger than the first.

The street folks were shocked by Sile's new building—they wondered where he had got the money to embark on such an enterprise. Sile was rumored to be constructing a mini-market store to compete with Alhaji Saifa, the owner of the street's

provision store. (And though the tea seller denied the rumor, it rapidly spread up and down the street, eventually creating bad blood between Sile and Alhaji Saifa.)

It took three days for Mallam Sile to complete work on the new shop's foundation, and an additional three weeks for him to erect the wooden walls and the aluminum roofing sheets. While Sile was busy at work, passersby would call out, "How is the provision store coming?" or "*Mai tea*, how is the mansion coming?" Sile would reply simply, "It is coming well, boy. It will be completed soon, *Inshallah*." He would grin his usual wide grin and wave his short hairy arms, and then return to his work.

Meanwhile, as the days and weeks passed, the street folks grew impatient and somewhat angry at the closing of Sile's shop. The nearest tea shack was three hundred metres away, on Zerikyi Road—and not only that but the owner of the shack, Abongo, was generally abhorred. And for good reason. Abongo, also a northerner, was quite unfriendly even to his loyal customers. He maintained a rigid no-credit policy, and made customers pay him even before they were served. No one was an exception to this policy—even if he or she was dying of hunger. And, unlike Sile, Abongo didn't tolerate idlers or loud conversation in his shop. If a customer persisted in chatting, Abongo reached for the customer's mug, poured the contents in a plastic basin, and refunded his money. He then chased the customer out of the shop, brandishing his bullwhip and cursing after him, "If your mama and papa never teach you manners, I'll teach you some! I'll sew those careless lips of yours together, you bastard son of a bastard woman!"

As soon as work on the shop was completed, Sile left for his home town. Soon afterward, yet another rumor surfaced: it was said that the tea seller had travelled up north in search of "black medicine" for his bad eyesight.

Sile finally returned one Friday evening, some six weeks after he'd begun work on the shop, flanked by a stern woman who looked to be in her late thirties and was three times larger than the tea seller. The woman, whose name was Abeeba, turned out to be Mallam Sile's wife. She was tall and massive, with a face as gloomy as that of someone mourning a dead relative. Like her hus-

band, Abeeba said very little to people in or out of the shop. She, too, grinned and waved her huge arms whenever she greeted people, though, unlike the tea seller, she seemed to have something harder lurking behind her cheerful smile. Abeeba carried herself with the grace and confidence of a lioness, and covered her head and part of her face with an Islamic veil, a practice that had been dropped by most of the married women on Zongo Street.

The rascals asked Sile, when they ran into him at the market, "From where did you get this elephant? Better not get on her bad side; she'll sit on you till you sink into the ground." To this, the tea seller did not say a word.

Exactly one week after Sile's return from his village, he and his wife opened the doors of the new shop to their customers. Among the most talked-about features were the smooth concrete floor and the bright gas lantern that illuminated every corner. In a small wooden box behind the counter, Sile and his wife burned *tularen mayu*, or witches' lavender, a strong yet sweet-smelling incense that doubled as a jinx repellent—to drive bad spirits away from the establishment.

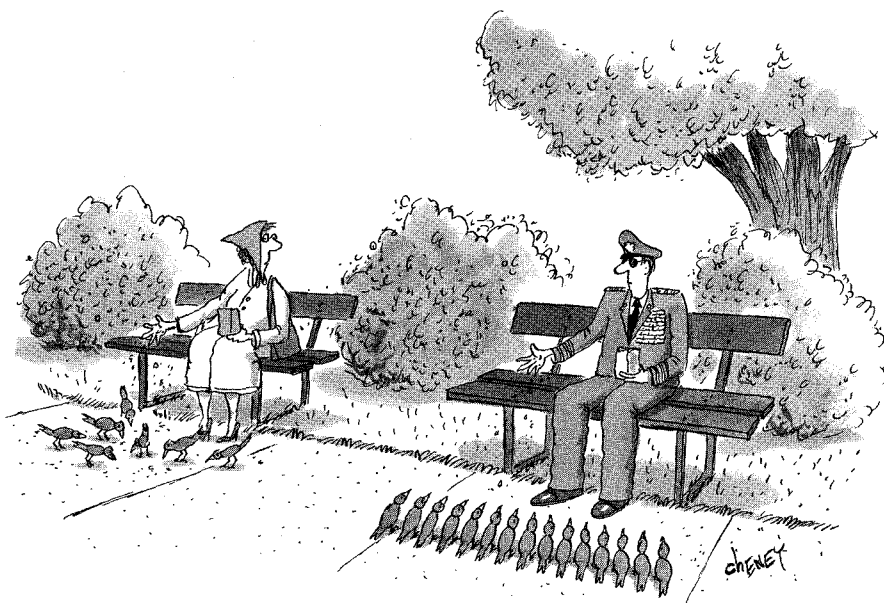
On the first night, the tea shop was so crowded that some customers couldn't find a seat, even with the twelve new metal folding chairs that Sile had bought. The patrons sang songs of praise to the variety of food on the new menu, which included meat pies, brown bread, custard, and Tom Brown, an imported grain

porridge. Some of the patrons even went so far as to thank Sile and his wife for relieving them of "Abongo's nastiness." But wise old Sile, who was as familiar with the street folks' cynicism as he was with the palms of his hands, merely nodded and grinned his sheepish grin. He knew that, despite their praise, and despite the smiles they flashed his way, some customers were at that very moment thinking of ways to cheat him.

While Sile prepared the tea and food, Abeeba served and collected the money. Prior to the shop's reopening, Abeeba had tried to convince her husband that they, too, should adopt Abongo's no-credit policy. Sile had quickly frowned upon the idea, claiming that it was inhumane to do such a thing.

The tea seller and his wife debated the matter for three days before they came to a compromise. They agreed to extend credit, but only in special cases and also on condition that the debtor swear by the Koran to pay on time; if a debtor didn't make a payment, he or she would not be given any credit in the future. But, even with the new policy in place, it wasn't long before some of the customers reverted to their old habits and began skipping payments. Then an encounter between Abeeba and one of the defaulters changed everything.

What took place was this: Samadu, the pugnacious sixteen-year-old whose fame had reached every corner of the city, was the tough guy of Zongo Street. He was of medium height, mus-



cular, and a natural-born athlete. For nine months running, no one in the neighborhood had managed to put Samadu's back to the ground in the haphazard wrestling contests held beside the central market's latrine. Samadu's "power" was such that parents paid him to protect their children from other bullies at school. He was also known for having tortured and even killed the livestock of the adults who denounced him. If they didn't have pets or domestic animals, he harassed their children for several days until he was appeased with cash or goods. Some parents won Samadu's friendship for their children by bribing him with gifts of money, food, or clothing.

Samadu, of course, was deeply in debt to Mallam Sile—he owed him eighty cedis, about four dollars. Early one Tuesday morning, Mallam Sile's wife showed up at Samadu's house to collect the money. Abeeba had tried to collect the debt amicably, but after her third futile attempt she had suggested to Sile that they use force to persuade the boy to pay. Sile had responded by telling his wife, "Stay out of that boy's way—he is dangerous. If he has decided not to pay, let him keep it. He will be the loser in the end."

"But, Mallam, it is an insult what he is doing," Abeeba argued. "I think people to whom we have been generous should only be generous in return. I am getting fed up with their ways, and the sooner the folks here know that even the toad gets sick of filling his belly with the same dirty pond water every day, the better!" Though Sile wasn't sure what his wife meant, he let the matter drop.

When Abeeba arrived at Samadu's house, a number of housewives and young women were busily doing their morning chores in and around the compound—some sweeping and stirring up dust, others fetching water from the tap in the compound's center or lighting up charcoal pots to warm the food left over from the previous night. Abeeba greeted them politely and asked to be shown to the tough guy's door. The women tried to turn Abeeba away, as they feared that Samadu would humiliate her in some way. But Abeeba insisted that she had important business with him, and so the housewives reluctantly directed her to Samadu's room, which, like all the young men's rooms, was situated just outside the main compound.

The usual tactic that the street's teenage boys used when fighting girls or women was to strip them of the wrapper around their waist, knowing that they would be reluctant to continue fighting half-naked. But Abeeba had heard young boys in the shop discussing Samadu's bullying ways and had come prepared for anything. She wore a sleeveless shirt and a pair of tight-fitting khaki shorts, and, for the first time ever, she had left her veil at home.

"You rogue! If you call yourself a man, come out and pay your debt!" Abeeba shouted, as she pounded on Samadu's door.

"Who do you think you are, ruining my sleep because of some useless eighty cedis?" Samadu screamed from inside.

"The money may be useless, but it is certainly worthier than you, and that's why you haven't been able to pay, you rubbish heap of a man!" Abeeba's voice was coarse and full of menace. The veins on her neck stood out, like those of the *juju* fighters at the annual wrestling contest. Her eyes moved rapidly inside her head, as though she were having a fit of some sort.

One of the onlookers, a famished-looking housewife, pleaded with the tea seller's wife, "Go back to your house, woman. Don't fight him, he will disgrace you in public." Another woman in the background added, "What kind of a woman thinks she can fight a man? Be careful, oh!"

Abeeba didn't pay any attention to the women's admonitions. Just then, a loud bang was heard inside the room. The door swung open, and Samadu stormed out, his face red with anger. "No one gets away with insulting me. No one!" he shouted. There was a line of dried drool on his right cheek, and whitish mucus had gathered in the corners of his eyes. "You ugly elephant-woman. After I am done with you today, you'll learn a lesson or two

about why women don't grow beards!"

"Ha, you teach me a lesson? You?" Abeeba said. "I, too, will educate you about the need to have money in your pocket before you flag the candy man!" With this, she lunged at Samadu.

The women placed their palms on their breasts, and their bodies shook with dread. "Where are the men on the street? Come and separate the fight, oh! Men, come out, oh!" they shouted. The children in the compound, though freshly aroused from sleep, hopped about excitedly, as if they were watching a ritual. Half of them called out, "*Piri pirin-pi!*," while the other half responded, "*Wein son!*," as they chanted and cheered for Samadu.

Samadu knew immediately that if he engaged Abeeba in a wrestling match she would use her bulky mass to force him to the ground. His strategy, therefore, was to throw punches and kicks from a safe distance, thereby avoiding close contact. But Abeeba was a lot quicker than he imagined, and she managed to dodge the first five punches he threw. He threw a sixth punch, and missed. He stumbled over his own foot when he tried to connect the seventh, and landed inches from Abeeba. With blinding quickness, she seized him by the sleeping wrapper tied around his neck and began to punch him. The exuberant crowd was hushed by this unexpected turn of events.

But Samadu wasn't heralded as the street's tough guy for nothing. He threw a sharp jab at Abeeba's stomach and succeeded in releasing himself from her grip by deftly undoing the knot of his sleeping cloth. He was topless now, clad only in a pair of corduroy knickers. He danced on his feet, swung his arms, and moved his torso from side to side, the way true boxers do. The crowd got excited again and picked up the fight song, "*Piri pirin-pi, Wein son! Piri pirin-pi, Wein son!*" Some among them shouted "Ali! Ali! Ali!" as Samadu danced and pranced, carefully avoiding Abeeba, who watched his movements with the keenness of a hungry lioness.

The women in the crowd went from holding their breasts to slapping their massive thighs. They jumped about nervously, moving their bodies in rhythm to the chants. The boys booed Abeeba, calling her all sorts of names for the beasts of the jungle. "Destroy that elephant!" they shouted.



The harder the crowd cheered for Samadu, the fancier his footwork became. He finally threw a punch that landed on Abeeba's left shoulder, though she seemed completely unfazed and continued to chase him around the small circle created by the spectators. When Samadu next threw his fist, Abeeba anticipated it. She dodged, then grabbed his wrist and twisted his arm with such force that he let out a high-pitched cry: "Wayyo Allah!" The crowd gasped as the tough guy attempted to extricate himself from Abeeba's grip. He tightened all the muscles in his body and craned his neck. But her strength was just too much for him.

The crowd booed, "Wooh, ugly rhinoceros." Then, in a sudden, swift motion, Abeeba lifted the tough guy off the ground, raised him above her head (the crowd booed louder), and dumped him back down like a sack of rice. She then jumped on top of him and began to whack him violently.

The women, now frantic, shouted, "Where are the men in this house?" Men, come out, oh! There is a fight!"

A handful of men came running to the scene, followed by many more a few minutes later.

Meanwhile, with each punch Abeeba asked, "Where is our money?"

"I don't have it, and wouldn't pay even if I did!" Samadu responded. The men drew nearer and tried to pull Abeeba off, but her grip on Samadu's waistband was too firm. The men pleaded with Abeeba to let go. "I will not release him until he pays us back our money!" she shouted. "And if he doesn't I'll drag his ass all the way to the Zongo police station."

On hearing this, an elderly man who lived in Samadu's compound ran inside the house; he returned a few minutes later with eighty cedis, which he placed in the palm of Abeeba's free hand. With one hand gripping Samadu's waistband, she used the fingers of the other to flip and count the money. Once she was sure the amount was right, she released the boy, giving him a mean, hard look as she left. The crowd watched silently, mouths agape, as though they had just witnessed something from a cinema reel.

Mallam Sile was still engaged in his morning *zikbr*, or meditation, when Abeeba returned to the shack. He, of course, had no inkling

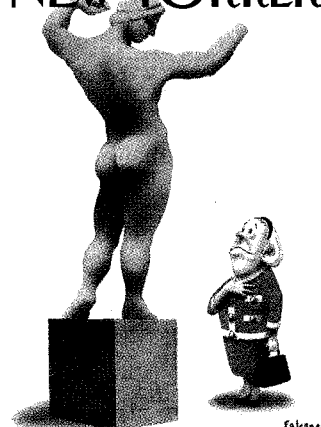
of what had taken place. Later, when Abeeba told him that Samadu had paid the money he owed, the tea seller, though surprised, didn't think to ask how this had happened. In his naïveté, he concluded that Samadu had finally been entered by the love and fear of God. Abeeba's news therefore confirmed Mallam Sile's long-standing belief that every man was capable of goodness, just as he was capable of evil.

The tea seller's belief was further solidified when he ran into Samadu a fortnight later. The tough guy greeted him politely, something he had never done before. When Mallam Sile related this to his wife, she restrained herself from telling him the truth. Abeeba knew that Sile would be quite displeased with her methods. Just a week ago, he had spoken to her about the pointlessness of using fire to put out fire, of how it "worsens rather than extinguishes the original flame." Abeeba prayed that no one else would tell her husband about her duel with Samadu, although the entire city seemed to know about it by now. Tough guys from other neighborhoods came to the tea shop just to steal a glance at the woman who had conquered the tough guy of Zongo Street.

Then one night during the fasting month of Ramadan, some two months after the fight, a voice in Mallam Sile's head asked, "Why is everyone calling my wife 'the man checker'? How come people I give credit to suddenly pay me on time? Why am I being treated with such respect, even by the worst and most stubborn rascals on the street?" Sile was lying in bed with his wife when these questions came to him. But, in his usual fashion, he didn't try to answer them. Instead, he drew in a deep breath and began to pray. He smiled and thanked Allahu-Raheemu, the Merciful One, for curing the street folks of the prejudice they had nursed against him for so long. Mallam Sile also thanked Allah for giving his neighbors the will and the courage to finally accept him just as he was created. He flashed a grin in the darkness and moved closer to his slumbering wife. He buried his small body in her massive, protective frame and soon fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. ♦

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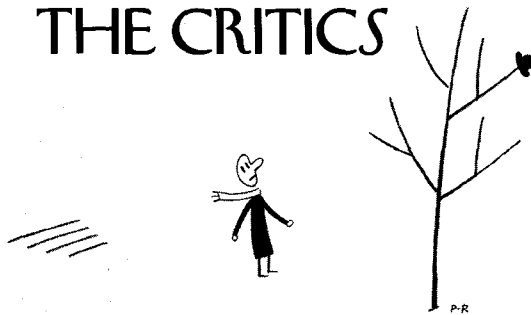
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ALWAYS WITH US?

Jeffrey Sachs's plan to eradicate world poverty.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

On July 9, 1985, a thirty-year-old American economist named Jeffrey Sachs stepped off a plane in La Paz, Bolivia, high in the Andes, where the inflation rate was three thousand per cent. Prices were rising so fast that on the streets of the capital people were frantically trading bags of depreciating pesos for dollars. Sachs, one of the youngest tenured professors in the history of the Harvard economics department, had established himself as an authority on inflation and international finance, and was someone who, in his own words, "thought that I knew just about everything that needed to be known" about his subject.

It was Sachs's self-confidence that had earned him an invitation to Latin America. A few months earlier, during a seminar at Harvard on the Bolivian crisis organized by some Latin-American students, he had interrupted the speaker, strode to the blackboard, and announced, "Here's how it works." When he finished scribbling equations, a voice at the back of the room said, "Well, if you're so smart, why don't you come down to La Paz to help us?" Sachs laughed, but the speaker, Carlos Iturralde, a Bolivian businessman who later became his country's foreign minister, wasn't joking. Seven weeks after Sachs arrived in La Paz, some of his recommendations were implemented, and three years of hyperinflation came to an immediate end.

Thus began the twenty-year journey through the developing world which Sachs recounts in "The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time"

(Penguin Press; \$27.95). From Bolivia, where he acted as an economic adviser for several years, Sachs moved on to Poland and Russia, where he played a controversial role in the transformation from Communism to capitalism, and, most recently, to sub-Saharan Africa. For the past three years, Sachs has been leading the Earth Institute at Columbia University and directing the United Nations Millennium Project, a multinational task force of economists, scientists, and development experts. The Millennium Project recently published a plan to halve global poverty and hunger by 2015—a target that the world community adopted in September, 2000, at the U.N. Millennium Summit. The plan calls on rich countries to double their financial assistance to poor nations, something that Sachs insists is workable, affordable, and in the long-term interest of the developed world. "Ending poverty is the great opportunity of our time," he writes.

As Sachs points out, more than a billion people currently subsist on less than a dollar a day—the standard threshold for "extreme poverty." Every year, hundreds of thousands die of starvation, malnutrition, or diseases like AIDS and malaria; tens of millions of children perish in infancy. In the face of this ongoing catastrophe, this year the American government will extend to poor countries approximately fifteen billion dollars in aid, which is roughly a thirtieth of the Pentagon budget and about an eighth of one per cent of the gross domestic product. (American private giving to the Third World typically

comes to another six billion.) Although President Bush agreed to quadruple aid, to an internationally agreed-upon target of 0.7 per cent of the G.D.P., he hasn't matched his rhetoric with extra cash. In 2002, he did set up a Millennium Challenge Account, which was supposed to direct money to developing nations. So far it has approved just a hundred and ten million dollars in grants, or about what it cost to make the movie "The Aviator."

In the absence of a natural disaster, such as the Asian tsunami, or a bloody civil conflict, such as the one in Sudan, the fate of the world's poor rarely attracts attention in this country. So it's greatly to Sachs's credit that he has been a gifted and tireless advocate; indeed, he may be the only economist to have published a book with a foreword by a rock star. ("His voice is louder than any electric guitar, heavier than heavy metal," writes Bono, the lead singer of U2.) But Sachs is also making some grand claims: "We can realistically envision a world without extreme poverty by 2025."

Can we? Poor countries have been receiving at least some foreign aid for thirty or forty years—a total of more than a trillion dollars, in one estimate—and, for the most part, it hasn't done much good. Generations of development experts have seen their plans stymied by the impediments of the real world. Has Jeffrey Sachs, a man who rose to prominence as a proponent of unfettered American-style capitalism in former Communist countries, really figured out a solution?

In the summer of 1989, Sachs was in Warsaw advising the Polish reformers who had won a historic victory in parliamentary elections. At a late-night meeting, he and a colleague, David Lipton, sketched out some ideas for decontrolling prices immediately, stabilizing the currency, cancelling foreign debts, and, eventually, privatizing state-owned enterprises. Jacek Kuron, one of the leaders of the Solidarity movement, told them to write up a plan. Sachs said they would go back to America and fax over some material within a week or two. "What do you mean?" Kuron demanded. "I need this tomorrow morning."

Sachs and Lipton worked through the night, and by dawn had completed a fifteen-page brief with a specific chronology of policy reforms. "It was the first



"Ending poverty is the great opportunity of our time," writes Sachs, who calls on rich countries to double their foreign-aid budgets.

time, I believe, that anyone had written down a comprehensive plan for the transformation of a socialist economy to a market economy," Sachs recounts. "Our proposal was for a dramatic, quick transformation." Some Polish economists advocated less radical changes, arguing that their country had neither the institutions nor the expertise necessary to handle unbridled capitalism, but on January 1, 1990, the government enacted the main elements of the Sachs-Lipton all-nighter as

part of a new policy that was widely referred to as "shock therapy," a phrase Sachs now dismisses as a misleading "journalistic concoction." Freed from government control, prices soared, and many people saw their savings wiped out. Unemployment rose sharply, too, especially in the heavy industries that had provided most of Solidarity's support. Although Sachs's Polish critics claimed that their warnings had been vindicated, he argues that his strategy worked out well over

time: "By 2002 Poland was 50 per cent richer in per capita terms than it had been in 1990, and it had logged the most successful growth record of any post-communist country in Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union."

If Sachs's account of his time in Poland sounds a little self-serving, his account of his time in Russia, where he advised the economic reformers who surrounded Boris Yeltsin when he came to power in the fall of 1991, is downright con-

tentious. "Many critics later accused me of peddling a ruthless form of free-market ideology in Russia," he writes. "That was not the case. My main activity for two years was an unsuccessful attempt to mobilize international assistance to help cushion the inevitable hardships that would accompany Russia's attempt to overcome the Soviet legacy."

Perhaps Sachs remembers things differently than others. According to other accounts, he brushed aside warnings that Russia wasn't ready for an immediate shift to capitalism and pushed for an overnight deregulation of prices, a drastic reduction in government borrowing, a sharp cut in subsidies to consumers and firms, and the selling off of state-owned enterprises, in addition to trying to secure financial assistance from the West. After the reform program was enacted, Russia experienced rampant inflation, a precipitous decline in industrial production, a surge in crime, an unprecedented fall in life expectancy, and the looting of the country's mineral wealth by well-connected businessmen, some of whom were gangsters. Sachs denies that these calamities had anything to do with the policies he espoused. "Most of the bad things that happened—such as the massive theft of state assets under the rubric of privatization—were directly contrary to the advice that I gave and to the principles of honesty and equity that I hold dear," he maintains. The responsible parties, in his view, included Viktor Geraschenko, "whom I tagged at the time as 'the world's worst Central Bank governor'"; the International Monetary Fund, which failed to provide adequate support for the ruble; and the United States government, which spurned Sachs's call for a Marshall Plan for Russia.

The fact is that in both Poland and Russia Sachs favored large-scale social engineering over gradual change and institution-building. The disastrous privatization policy is one example. Al-

though most of the privatization took place after Sachs left Russia, at the end of 1994, the original policy framework was put in place in 1992 and 1993, when he was still there. Each Russian was given a voucher worth ten thousand rubles to bid for stocks in newly private companies. Many people didn't understand what was happening, and they sold their vouchers cheaply to better-informed insiders, who ended up controlling many of the privatized companies. Sachs, though, denies that he made any mistakes, or that the transition to capitalism could have been better managed. "Looking back, would I have advised Russia differently knowing what I know today?" he writes. "To a large extent, the answer is no."

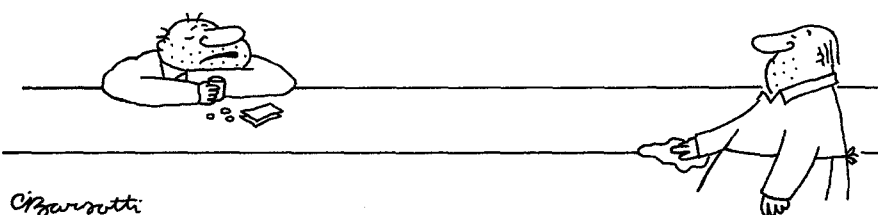
Sachs returned to Harvard full time in 1994, but he also continued to travel widely as a consultant. For several years, he worked with the World Economic Forum, a pro-globalization group that organizes an annual conference in Davos, Switzerland. He wrote for an annual publication called the *Global Competitiveness Report*, in which he criticized big government and expounded the virtues of open markets. On the latter point, Sachs has been consistent. Although he now tips his hat to anti-globalization protesters who detest everything Davos stands for, commending them for "ending years of self-congratulation by the rich and powerful," he also regards them as fundamentally misguided. "By now the anti-globalization movement should see that globalization, more than anything else, has reduced the numbers of extreme poor in India by two hundred million and in China by three hundred million since 1990," he writes. "Far from being exploited by multinational companies, these countries and many others like them have achieved unprecedented rates of economic growth on the basis of foreign direct investment (FDI) and

the export-led growth that followed."

The facts support Sachs: between 1990 and 2001, G.D.P. per capita rose by 5.5 per cent a year in East Asia and by 3.2 per cent a year in South Asia, and poverty fell sharply in both regions. Despite the claims of some analysts on the left, economic growth really is the best anti-poverty strategy. If the rest of the developing world had matched the growth rates of China and India, victory over poverty would be in sight. Unfortunately, in sub-Saharan Africa, between 1990 and 2002, per-capita income didn't rise at all, and the number of people living on less than a dollar a day increased by a third, to more than three hundred and thirty million.

The failure of globalization to enrich the world's poorest continent presents a dilemma for its champions, such as Thomas Friedman, the *Times* Op-Ed columnist. His new book, "The World Is Flat" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$27.50), explains how factors like technology and outsourcing have made the planet even smaller and more competitive than it was in 1999, when he published his first book on globalization, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree." Still, he recognizes that the three billion people who remain in or near poverty have yet to see the benefits. "If it was just a matter of time, you know, give it twenty or thirty years and the others will be there, then it would be great to declare that the whole world is flat," Friedman quotes Bill Gates, the chairman of Microsoft, as saying. "But the fact is there is a trap that these 3 billion people are caught in, and they may never get into the virtuous circle of more education, more health, more capitalism, more rule of law, more wealth. . . . I am worried that it could be just half the world that is flat and it stays that way."

Well, nobody can accuse Friedman of leaving out evidence that contradicts his argument, and he does provide an engaging journalistic guide to the competitive challenges facing the United States. Africa's failure to prosper in an era of globalization represents a more serious challenge to economists. Back in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, many economists were confident that newly independent African countries, such as Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda, would be able to escape poverty if only Western donors filled the "financing gap" between what they could afford and the resources they needed



"You know what you're running here, Lou? You're running a haven, that's what you're running here, Lou."

to invest in factories, roads, railways, and other forms of infrastructure. Once these nations developed modern industrial sectors, the thinking went, the rest of their economies would be pulled along. In a 1960 book, "The Stages of Economic Growth," W. W. Rostow, an economic historian at M.I.T., popularized a version of this argument, saying that if underdeveloped nations doubled investment rates, they would soon "take off" into self-sustained growth. During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, in which Rostow served, America's foreign-aid budget reached an all-time high of 0.6 per cent of G.D.P., and during the seventies and eighties significant amounts of aid continued to flow to poor countries.

Much of that money was invested in grand projects, such as factories, highways, and dams. Kwame Nkrumah, the nationalist leader of Ghana, built the Akosombo Dam and thus created Lake Volta, one of the world's biggest man-made bodies of water. The dam generated electricity for one major aluminum plant, but it didn't lead to much other development, and it had unanticipated side effects: many of the people living next to the lake suffered from waterborne diseases like river blindness. Meanwhile, the Ghanaian government imposed heavy taxes on the country's one internationally competitive industry, cocoa production. After decades of aid and investment, most Ghanaians were no better off than they had been at independence.

Ghana has proved all too representative. As William Easterly, an economist formerly with the World Bank, has observed, many countries that received a significant amount of aid, such as Ghana, Zambia, Chad, and Zimbabwe, had economies that either failed to grow much or actually shrank. Meanwhile, a number of places that received very little foreign assistance, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, expanded rapidly. Looking at the over-all record, there appears to be no statistical correlation between aid and growth.

Sachs acknowledges past failures only briefly. "I reject the plaintive cries of the doomsayers who say that ending poverty is impossible," he writes. "I have identified the specific investments that are needed; found ways to plan and implement them; shown that they can be af-

fordable; and addressed the counsels of despair who claim that the poor are condemned by their cultures, values, and personal behaviors." Setting aside the solipsism of Sachs's "I"—ten specialist task forces and a sizable secretariat worked on the U.N. anti-poverty plan—his argument deserves to be taken seriously. He points to a recent body of research, originating at the World Bank, which suggests that aid can stimulate economic growth if it is given to countries with decent governments. Perhaps wisely, though, Sachs doesn't rely too heavily on statistical findings, which are almost always ambiguous. (Easterly has recently challenged the World Bank's results; other economists claim to have substantiated them.) Instead of defending past practices, Sachs advocates a new approach—"clinical economics," he calls it—which pays attention to the history, ethnography, and politics of individual countries, rather than imposing uniform policies.

To explain how Africa might prosper, he knows, requires an account of why it hasn't. Many development experts have been inclined to blame political pathologies. "Poor performers have corrupt, predatory or brutal governments, or sometimes, even worse, no government at all, but rather civil war among competing warlords," Martin Wolf, a British economics commentator, noted in his recent book, "Why Globalization Works." "The failure of the state to provide almost any of the services desperately needed for development is at the root of the African disaster." Sachs begs to differ. The quality of governance is low in Africa, he concedes, but that's the case in nearly all impoverished regions. And the causation runs from economics to politics, rather than vice versa: "Africa's governance is poor because Africa is poor."

Why is Africa poor? Sachs argues that economists have generally paid too little attention to geographic factors. In Bolivia, three years into his career as an economic adviser, he met a World Bank consultant named David Morawetz, who pointed out that Bolivia was a landlocked country with high transport costs. As a result, it had succeeded only in exporting goods with a high value-to-weight ratio, such as silver, tin, and cocaine. Lower-

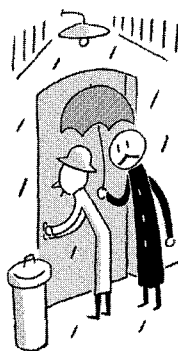
value goods, such as foodstuffs, were not worth exporting once the cost of getting them to the market was taken into account. "Morawetz's point about Bolivia's geographical distress was truly (and incredibly) something new to me," Sachs recounts. "In all of my training, the ideas of physical geography and the spatial distribution of economic activity had not even been mentioned." Alerted to the impor-

tance of geography, Sachs decided that Africa's failure to develop was probably connected to the fact that much of the continent is hot, isolated, and ridden with tropical diseases. Starved of fertile soil, transport links, power, and adequate health care, much of the continent is stuck in "the worst poverty trap in the world."

He describes visiting a group of villages in the Sauri region of western Kenya, where AIDS has stricken thirty per cent of the populace and the survivors don't have enough money for fertilizer or mosquito nets. "There are no cars or trucks owned or used within Sauri and only a handful of villagers said they had ridden in any kind of motorized transport during the last year," he writes. "Around half of the individuals at the meeting said that they had never made a phone call in their lives." With some relatively modest resources, Sachs says, a "clinical economist" could provide many of the things that Sauri desperately needs: a power line to a nearby town, a health clinic with a doctor and nurse, fertilizer, water-storage facilities, mosquito nets, a cell phone, a truck.

How much would all this cost? Sachs and his colleagues at Columbia's Earth Institute estimate the bill for getting the Sauri region up on its feet at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars annually, or about seventy dollars per inhabitant per year. "The benefits would be astounding," Sachs writes. "Decisive malaria control, a doubling or tripling of food yields with a drastic reduction of chronic hunger and malnutrition, improved school attendance, a reduction of waterborne disease, a rise in incomes through the sale of surplus grains and cash crops."

The U.N. anti-poverty plan would take that Sauri rescue program and scale it up. Each low-income country would devise a detailed multi-year poverty-reduction strategy, identifying its specific needs,



which it would then submit to the donor countries. After reviewing the plan, demanding modifications where necessary, the donors would agree to provide enough money to carry out the strategy. Until the poor countries submit their requests, it is impossible to know exactly how much the U.N. plan would cost, but Sachs suggests a figure of a hundred and thirty-five billion dollars in 2006, rising to a hundred and ninety-five billion dollars in 2015.

Curiously, Sachs scarcely acknowledges that his views have evolved over the years. In a 1996 article for the World Economic Forum, he argued that big government and social-welfare spending impede growth. Now he is calling for the West to finance big-government programs in Africa. Still, readers will be more concerned with the practicality of his proposals than with the consistency of his opinions. And the plan his book lays out is impressive not only in its ambition but in some of its details.

He argues, persuasively, that aid ought to be extended in the form of grants, instead of loans, which have to be repaid, and that it shouldn't be tied to specific expenditures. (Some donors have insisted that the money they give be spent on goods and services they export.) Ideally, aid should also be guaranteed for long periods. "In the past, donors often helped countries to build clinics, but then rejected the plea to help cover the salaries of doctors and nurses to help staff the clinics," Sachs notes. "The predictable result has been the construction of empty shells rather than operating health facilities."

Under the U.N. plan, financial assistance would be extended until 2015, as long as the recipients met certain performance targets. Health care, primary schooling, and other services for the poor would be provided free of charge, reversing the recent trend toward user fees, which the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have encouraged in a misguided effort to improve efficiency. "The extreme poor don't have enough to eat, much less to pay for electricity or water or bed nets or contraceptives," Sachs observes.

He's surely right to emphasize spending on health care, direct poverty relief, and education. For one thing, rates of infection, malnutrition, and enrollment

in schools are a lot easier to monitor than over-all economic progress. In Tanzania in 2001, for example, the government more than doubled the education budget and abolished user fees, using aid money to help meet the cost. Since then, the enrollment rate in primary schools has risen from sixty per cent to ninety per cent.

Yet, as the history of development policy suggests, there can be political dangers to overpromising, and Sachs, by placing so much emphasis on geography, underplays other reasons for Africa's stalled development. Most African countries, bequeathed arbitrary borders by their colonial heritages, are ethnically heterogeneous, and that has led to political problems, as groups compete for the spoils of government. Kenya, which contains about forty different ethnic communities, has been plagued by corruption and ethnic conflict, as have many African nations. Congo, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and several other countries have been riven by what the development economist Paul Collier refers to as resource wars, in which rival ethnic groups compete for control of valuable natural resources.

Sachs, as he did in Poland and Russia, refuses to acknowledge that institutional failures could hobble his ambitious plans. "Africa shows absolutely no tendency to be more or less corrupt than any other countries at the same income level," he writes. Then he presents the results of a study that he and some colleagues carried out recently, using various indicators of quality of governance. Countries they judge to have "average" standards of governance include Chad, Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone—all places that have recently experienced devastating civil conflicts.

Many African scholars, such as the Ghanaian economist George B. N. Ayittey, are far more willing to criticize their kleptocratic governments than Sachs is. Ayittey points out that aid money sometimes helps corrupt and incompetent regimes to remain in power. The World Bank and the I.M.F. extended nine loans to the tyrannical administration of Mobutu Sese Seko, who looted Zaire for decades, at one point taking personal control of an entire gold-mining region. Sweden and other Scandinavian countries supported Julius Nyerere's socialist

regime in Tanzania, which almost destroyed the agricultural sector by dragging scattered bushmen into collective farms.

Sachs also downplays the problem of misappropriated aid. Many African nations are so poor that under the U.N. plan they would probably receive annual aid payments equivalent to fifteen to twenty per cent of their gross domestic product. Without adequate safeguards, one has to wonder how much of this money would end up helping the people it was supposed to reach. Sachs's plan calls for recipient governments to commit to good governance, it's true, but, once the money started flowing, these assurances would need to be supplemented with stringent external supervision.

Still, Sachs is right to challenge the pessimism that blankets the issue of foreign aid. Americans tend to view the entire sub-Sahara as a disaster area. In fact, during the past decade many African countries have edged toward democracy. A number of dictatorial leaders have retired, died, or been overthrown, including Kenya's Daniel Arap Moi, Nigeria's Sani Abacha, and Zaire's Mobutu. In 2003, Freedom House, the nonpartisan advocacy group, rated eleven African countries as free and twenty as partly free. That's a big improvement over the state of affairs twenty years ago.

On the economic front, too, there have been glimmers of progress. The rapid development of Mauritius, an island off the coast of East Africa that has a thriving textiles industry, shows that under the right conditions Africans can compete in the world economy. The sharp rise in the price of oil, coffee, and other commodities has buoyed African commodity producers, such as Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, and Mozambique. Even some big countries that previously appeared to have stagnated, such as Ethiopia, Ghana, and Uganda, have recently managed to maintain modest gains in per-capita income.

What Africa needs is one or two unequivocal success stories that would serve as models to reformers in other places and attract global investors. Among the strongest arguments for the U.N. anti-poverty plan is that it would offer help and encouragement to countries that have embarked on reform programs but are still struggling to break out

of poverty traps. "The biggest problem today is not that poorly-governed countries get too much aid," Sachs notes, "but that well-governed countries get too little." Ghana, Kenya, and Ethiopia are good examples. Each of these countries has worked with the World Bank and the I.M.F. to introduce reforms but is also facing enormous challenges, such as AIDS and malaria and heavy debts.

Although a little humility would help his cause, Sachs, youthful still at fifty, must be commended for trying to hold rich nations to their promises, and for reminding his countrymen that military action is not the only way to export American values. It will be fascinating to see how he gets on with Paul Wolfowitz, President Bush's nominee to head the World Bank. Some commentators have speculated that Wolfowitz will seek to revolutionize the Bank's lending policies. It is more likely that the Bank, which is full of well-meaning and knowledgeable people, will influence Wolfowitz's thinking, as happened to Wolfowitz's predecessors, including the Bank's current president, James Wolfensohn, and, going back thirty-seven years, Robert McNamara, who also moved to the Bank from the Pentagon. Once you immerse yourself in the realities of global poverty, you're likely to rethink even your most cherished orthodoxies. Just look at Jeffrey Sachs.

In a few months, Wolfowitz may well be pressing politicians in rich countries to increase their aid budgets, including his former colleagues in the Bush Administration. In order to pay its share of the U.N. poverty plan, the United States would have to find another forty billion dollars a year by 2015. Sachs reminds us that merely reversing the President's first-term tax cuts for those earning more than half a million dollars a year would generate enough to meet this target. Here's another way to look at it: to pay for the extra spending, each American would have to contribute less than the cost of buying a cappuccino from Starbucks once a week. Aid is not a panacea, and, even if the funding Sachs wants were to materialize, his grandest objectives may well remain unfulfilled. But, targeted carefully, aid can reward responsible governments, encourage individual initiative, and alleviate suffering. Surely that's worth a cup of coffee. ♦

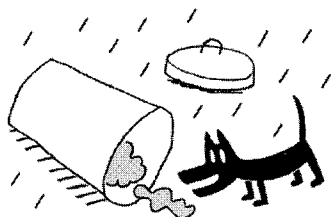
BRIEFLY NOTED

The Bones, by Seth Greenland (*Bloomsbury*; \$24.95). When Frank Bones and Lloyd Melnick first meet, in New York, Bones is a hot comedian, and Melnick an admiring young profile writer at an alternative weekly. Years later, in L.A., Bones's career has tanked, and Melnick, now a television writer, has a twelve-million-dollar contract with a network that happens also to be offering the eclipsed comic a role as an Eskimo in a sitcom set in the Arctic. Melnick's success has made him just as miserable and insecure as oblivion has made Bones. He longs to be a "real" writer but can't make headway on a novel. The plot follows the two men as their paths cross in increasingly violent circumstances. Though many of the book's targets—S.U.V.s, feng shui, Restoration Hardware—feel familiar, Greenland, having worked on the HBO series "Arliss," clearly knows the culture he's sending up.

Privilege, by Ross Gregory Douthat (*Hyperion*; \$24.95). Close on the heels of Tom Wolfe's "I Am Charlotte Simmons" and the flap surrounding Harvard's president, Lawrence Summers, comes this memoir-cum-polemic about Harvard by a 2002 graduate. Douthat critiques his peers' sense of entitlement from the perspective of a cultural conservative, although his high moral tone is somewhat compromised by an eagerness to bolster this account of campus life with salacious anecdotes of debauchery, greed, and snobbery. Douthat skewers the political and sexual shenanigans of his classmates and provides a thoughtful analysis of the prevailing liberal politics of the campus. But his righteous indignation can seem misplaced, when so many of the injustices that exercise him are so petty. It's hard to get really upset about charges of button-stealing in a campus election.

Stephen Spender, by John Sutherland (*Oxford*; \$40). Despite his versatility as a man of letters, Stephen Spender never lacked for hostile critics, and even his friends could not resist twitting him: Cyril Connolly once giped that there were two Stephen Spenders—one "an inspired simpleton; a great big silly goose, a holy Russian idiot," the other a clever operator who was "shrewd, ambitious, aggressive and ruthless." Sutherland, an able advocate, portrays Spender as a decent and unfairly maligned figure whose early success as a poet in the thirties was a "cross he bore all his life." Still, Spender moved easily in transatlantic intellectual circles, a footloose lecturer, broadcaster, and evangelist for liberal ideals during the Cold War years (although tainted by a scandal concerning the C.I.A.-funded journal *Encounter*, where he served as co-editor). Sutherland's authorized biography takes Spender's literary achievement as a given, but his close readings of the poems don't quite persuade one that Spender was a writer of the first rank.

Strange Days, Dangerous Nights, by Larry Millett (*Borealis Books*; \$29.95). The photographs in this collection are taken from the files of the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* and the St. Paul *Dispatch*, and span a period from the nineteen-forties to the mid-sixties. Among the many records of long-forgotten civic functions are shocking crime-scene photographs, a reminder of an era when the country's newspaper photographers—an army of Weegees, equipped with oversized Speed Graphic flash cameras and radios tuned to the police scanners—regularly provided readers with lurid coverage of violent crimes and spectacular accidents. There is a harsh intimacy to these photographs, which bring us as close as possible to car-crash victims, suicides, and mass murderers confessing their crimes. But the welter of detail in the pictures—the seamed stockings of a murder victim, the huddle of bystanders after a bar shooting—provides a nuanced portrait of a Midwestern city and of American culture at midcentury.



LIVING LARGE

Kirstie Alley fills the screen in "Fat Actress."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

When Roseanne Barr took the stage at the dopey TV Land Awards last month to accept an award, she said, by way of explaining that she was grateful for the recognition, "Even though I'm slim, my ego is still morbidly obese." It was an acknowledgment both of the entertaining monstrousness of show-business personalities and of the tabloid tracking of the ups and downs of her poundage over the years. Of course, Roseanne began her career as an overweight "domestic goddess," out to puncture the stereotype of the happy housewife who aimed to please, and her unbuff body played its part in enabling her to turn anger into gold. It's a little different, to say the least, for actresses whose careers depend greatly on their ability to maintain their measurements. The humiliation an unknown person might feel if she gained weight must, for a famous and successful actress, be multiplied by about ten million—a reasonable guess at the number of dollars she stands to lose for each increase in dress size.

Money, though, is not the issue in Kirstie Alley's new close-to-reality series on Showtime, "Fat Actress." Alley, whose weight gain has been thoroughly chronicled and photographed in celebrity-dish rags in the last couple of years, has pulled off a comic victory over the tabloids in this show, by sending up both her own voracious appetite and the absurdities of the entertainment industry. As the title indicates, "Fat Actress" is as subtle as the bloody end of a meat-axe, but Alley's very outrageousness is what makes it work. Cleverly, she plays herself as a character who is obsessed with the tabloids—eager to find flaws in what they say about her but gullible when it comes to what is reported about other celebrities. Instead of showing her pain in a naked way, and trying to earn viewers' sympathy for the "real" Kirstie Alley, she shows us the funny side of desperation and of being written about as though she were a mutant lab specimen. (One of the tabloids she reads is called

The Intruder.) Alley's goal in "Fat Actress" is to get her own network show—and to get thin enough so that Kid Rock will want to sleep with her—but her quest is almost surely doomed. The double standard for men and women in movies and on TV, especially in sitcoms—half a dozen of which feature fat men who are married to knockouts—is now so glaring that it's

Brenda Hampton (who is best known for begetting the family drama "7th Heaven," the WB's most successful show and the polar opposite of this project). The third executive producer on the team is Sandy Chanley, who has produced dozens of comedy specials (Chris Rock, Richard Lewis, Kathy Griffin, Bill Maher, et al.) and is a co-executive producer of "Curb Your Enthusiasm," which Alley's show somewhat resembles. In both programs, the episodes follow an outline but are largely improvised; they revolve around the day-to-day life of a Hollywood celebrity, and feature a couple of regulars who act as foils and a lineup of guest stars who appear as themselves, or as exaggerated versions of themselves, and deliberately play up the few hard bits of information that celebrity-



By sending up her own appetites, Alley has her cake and eats it, too.

sometimes used as a joke on TV shows. In Hollywood, a fat actress is at the bottom of the food chain. (Seven episodes of "Fat Actress" have been filmed, and Alley has story lines ready to go if the series is renewed and she continues to lose weight; she has lost more than twenty pounds since the show began shooting, last fall.)

Alley created and wrote the show with

watchers and fans actually have on them. Mayim Bialik, who was the young star of "Blossom," in the early nineties, and is now getting a Ph.D. in neuroscience at U.C.L.A., plays herself as a mildly annoying neighbor of Alley's, and she refers several times to her own intelligence. One day, she walks uninvited into Alley's house, and when Kirstie, who always calls

her Blossom, asks how she figured out the combination to her gate, Bialik says, "I don't want to brag, but I'm kind of a genius." (The combination is 1-2-3.) For TV viewers who feel guilty for having noticed this season that Leah Remini, the co-star of "The King of Queens," has not regained her petite figure after having a baby last year, Remini shows up, in the fourth episode, to make fun of her own unaccustomed size. Coming out of a restaurant with friends and complaining about feeling big and bloated after the meal, she says, not knowing that Alley is within earshot, "I'm, like, getting into Kirstie Alley territory." (An unstated joke in this scene, for people who watch Remini's show—one of the best comedies on TV—is that the actor who plays her husband, Kevin James, ranks high on the list of sitcom teletubbies who are married to hotties.)

As Rebecca on "Cheers," a part she played back when she was svelte, Alley seemed to sprawl, to be all over the place. She played big, and that was a large part of her appeal: she was a lot of woman. But the pictures that ran last year in the *Star*, among other publications, certainly show that there's a difference between figurative and literal bigness. They're shocking—you rarely see a woman as attractive as Alley go so far off the rails. There's no getting around it: she's really fat. But Alley doesn't try to get around it. She harps on her weight (and seeks out only the most cockamamie methods for losing it) so relentlessly that sometimes you feel the show goes a little too far in depicting gluttony and its wages, even though the point of "Fat Actress" is to go too far—to bite off more than it can chew. The spirit is right, but the food jokes don't always work. In one episode, Alley who believes that black men are more enthusiastic about "ample rump" than white men are, brings home a black NBC executive. In the sex scene that follows, he dangles a steak in front of her, and she barks like a dog. It's a distraction from the funniest thing about the scene: the lights in her bedroom are controlled by the Clapper, and every time the guy excitedly smacks her behind, the lights go on, and Kirstie, who is uncomfortable being looked at, has to keep slapping his face to turn them off.

It's Alley's comedic talent, not her willingness to let the camera zoom in on her rear end as she bends down (though that does take guts), that gives "Fat Actress" its juice. In a conversation with her manager,

who tells her that she has a "holding" deal with NBC but has to lose some weight before she can have her own show, Kirstie gives the phone the finger, and then sweetly says "I will" into the receiver. Alley's still spilling over, leaving her mark wherever she goes, while her two assistants (Bryan Callen and Rachael Harris, both of them terrific) trail behind her, mopping up and soothing her easily flustered ego. In one scene, as she tries to convince John Travolta that she's O.K.—he had rushed over to her house, not realizing that, when she told him on the phone that people were trying to kill her, it was only an over-the-top response to the news that Jenny Craig wanted her as a spokesperson—she pushes her fingers into his cheeks and says, "*Week-a, week-a, week-a, week-a,*" in a baby voice, to let him know how cute it was of him to worry about her. By inappropriately deflecting attention from herself, she makes herself the center of attention. There is a refreshing lack of psychologizing in "Fat Actress"; seeing Kirstie sit in her car in her bathrobe, stuffing her face with a burger—replicating one of the *Star* photographs—and at the same time whining to her manager, "Why can't I just get a show first and then lose the weight?" tells you all you need to know about the persistence of infantile needs and demands into adulthood and about the supersized narcissism of celebrities.

I can't imagine what made Farrah Fawcett agree to do a reality show for TV Land, and she can't, either. At the beginning of "Chasing Farrah," a seven-episode series on Wednesday nights, the director of the show asks her, and she says, "I guess we don't know the answer yet." But you know what? I don't care. I'm sweet on this show, and I've never seen even a single episode of "Charlie's Angels." For one thing, Fawcett's hair and makeup stylist looks and sounds like Rhoda Morgenstern, and she provides mordant commentary on Fawcett's dizzy declarations, such as her announcement that she knows how to fly a 767. For another, when you see Fawcett playing Frisbee on the beach with Ryan O'Neal, or dancing with him in her kitchen—both of them dazzlingly tanned and fit and handsome—you can't help basking in their evident and enormous pleasure in each other's company. Whether it's real or whether it's acting, all you want is to watch them live happily ever after. ♦

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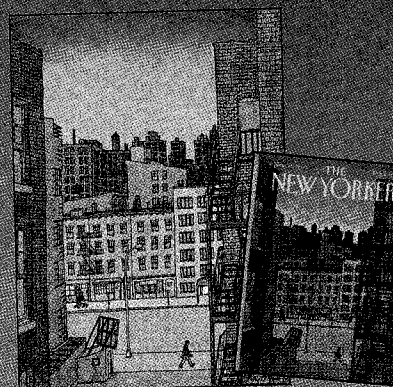
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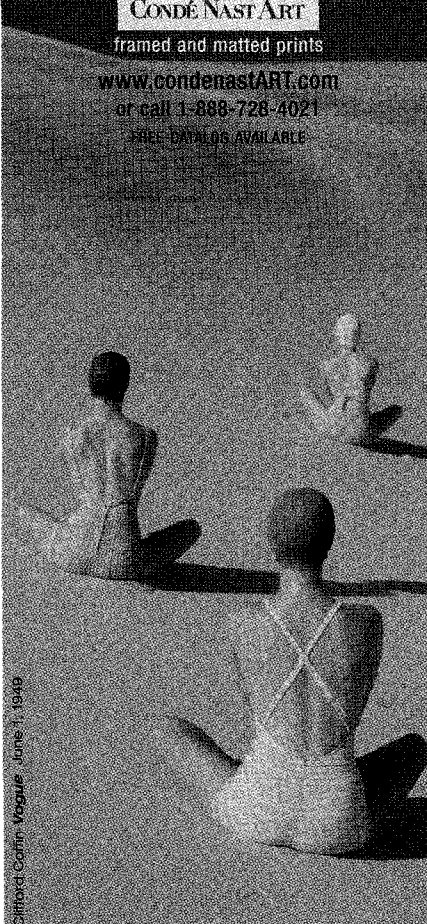
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POP MUSIC

SLOW FADE

The afterlife of an indie band.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In the summer of 1989, a band called Slaughterhouse played at the Pyramid, a club in the East Village. The band was generically noisy, and hostile in a manner that was common at the time, especially among groups that performed in the neighborhood. David Pajo, a young guitarist with Slint, a Louisville band that was scheduled to appear later that night, watched the show from the bar.

"Slaughterhouse had many televisions onstage with them," Pajo recalled. "I remember a video loop of a girl opening her mouth while a guy pissed in it; a girl fellating a mule in a barn; and a woman putting her footless leg into another woman. Quite disturbing." Partway through the set, Pajo left the club to check out the homeless people living in Tompkins Square Park. While he was gone, Slaughterhouse's lead singer set his hair on fire and vomited. When Pajo returned, it was Slint's turn to play. Brian McMahan, the group's singer and second guitarist, carefully wiped the vomit from the microphone. The band's members were wearing shorts and looked wholesome, as though they were on loan from a private-school squash team.

They performed songs from their album "Tweez," and some longer, slower numbers, all executed with unusual precision. Few of the tracks featured singing, and what vocals there were seemed like an afterthought. As unlike each other as two rock bands could be, Slint and Slaughterhouse had roots in a sub-genre of nineteen-eighties independent rock which was sometimes called "pig-fuck" by the music press, and which was exemplified by Big Black, a band known for its harsh sounds and shock tactics. (The first edition of Big Black's 1987 EP, "Headache," came sealed in a black vinyl bag containing two photographs of a man who had recently removed his head with a shotgun blast.) But Big Black had also created some smart music, inventing a gloriously discomfiting, trebly howl that made you feel as though

you were being rubbed down with hot stones and ammonia.

Slaughterhouse must have looked at Big Black's icky photos; Slint had listened to its music. "Tweez," which was released in 1988, had been recorded by Steve Albini, Big Black's singer and guitarist, who was also a contributor to *Forced Exposure*, a widely read fanzine. Albini was the Jackson Pollock and Clement Greenberg of eighties indie rock: he made important music and told people how to talk about it. When Albini announced in *Pulse!*, a free magazine put out by Tower Records, that Slint was the new band he was most excited about, fans paid attention.

By the time Slint appeared at the Pyramid, however, indie rock was undergoing a transformation. Big Black had broken up in 1987, and major-label bands like Nine Inch Nails were taking aggressive noise and violent subject matter into the mainstream. Slint had outgrown its noise-rock beginnings, and the slow, nearly wordless songs that the band performed that night were something new.

In the fall of 1990, with the help of an engineer named Brian Paulson, the group recorded a new album. But in January, 1991, a few weeks before it was to be released, and three months before Slint was to embark on its first European tour, McMahan quit the band. The tour was cancelled. Slint, it seemed, was history.

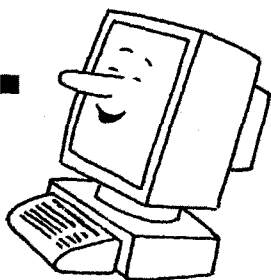
Then the album, "Spiderland," appeared. On its cover was a black-and-white photograph of the musicians swimming in an abandoned quarry, their smiling faces hovering above the water. But the record was not the product of feckless youths; it was a foray, both brave and frightened, into adulthood. Just six songs and thirty-nine minutes long, "Spiderland" was sui generis, a series of compositions so studiously arranged that they sound as though they might have been notated, like classical music, though they retain the rawness and inti-



Brian McMahan, David Pajo, and Britt Walford of the Louisville band Slint. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

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macy of improvisation. Several of the tracks feature clean guitar arpeggios rotating over slightly dissonant bass pedal points, and build to glowing codas of resonant sound. All but one song is anchored by Britt Walford's drumming, which rides the back edge of the beat but never falls off, creating a delicious tension. The few lyrics are nearly inaudible and sound like excerpts from short stories: a boy takes a girl on a roller coaster; a man leaves a party, thinking about what he should have said; and, on "Good Morning, Captain," the album's final cut, a sailor awakes after a shipwreck and is confronted by a small child looking for help.

During the nineteen-nineties, "Spiderland" sold steadily, a rare feat for an obscure, independent band that no longer existed and had performed live fewer than thirty times. (According to Nielsen SoundScan, forty-eight thousand copies of the album have been bought in the United States to date, but since not all independent record stores report their sales to SoundScan, the number may be much greater.) In 1991, Albini reviewed "Spiderland" for *Melody Maker*, a popular British weekly, calling it "flawless" and awarding it "ten fucking stars."

Slint spawned so many imitators—Mogwai may be the best known—that the band became a genre within indie rock, a style in which boys, choked with emotion and capable only of murmurs or shouts, play each song more slowly than it wants to be played, and find deep significance in their every utterance. "Spiderland" deserves the overheated praise, but it was partly responsible for the enervation and increasing insularity of independent rock music during the nineties, a decade in which hip-hop, teen pop, and dance-hall, by contrast, became ever more formally omnivorous and pleasurable. The problem was that Slint did not create a simple, easily imitated beat like Bo Diddley, or an elemental song like the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K.," which anyone could learn to play. Slint—or "Spiderland," because the two had become interchangeable—was like that grilled-cheese sandwich bearing the face of the Virgin Mary: an unlikely and irreproducible marvel.

After years spent dodging disappointed fans, the band's members were persuaded by Barry Hogan, a British concert promoter, to perform together at a music festival

in Camber Sands, England, in February. That appearance led to a twenty-two-date tour in the United States, during which Slint played before approximately twenty-four thousand people.

The reunion was strictly temporary; officially, Slint remains broken up. In mid-March, the group performed a three-night stand at Irving Plaza, in New York. The mood in the audience on the night I went was reverential and slightly tense, like a prom at which only boys—the crowd was disproportionately young and male—have shown up. There was some earnest shushing during the painfully quiet songs, the faithful apparently wanting to commune in peace with the human beings who had made *that* record.

The band played all of "Spiderland" and much of "Tweez." The set began with Slint's most satisfying song, "Good Morning, Captain," a creepy vamp held down by a drumbeat that could readily be turned into a hip-hop sample. For six minutes, the track inched along until—in one of the evening's few traditional rock moments—it exploded with two enormous, distorted chords, each separated by tiny pauses, as McMahan screamed, "I miss you!" The words seemed, in the context of the show, to be a proxy for all the stuff that boys don't talk about: that excruciating weekend with your new stepfather; that scary walk in the woods; that rift with your best friend, whom you haven't seen in years. As the band played, I scribbled down names and associations, few of them related to music: Samuel Beckett, imagined movie dialogue, and snippets of vaguely recollected episodes of "Wild Kingdom." Instrumental music demands this kind of coloring in, and Slint's triggers an ever-changing series of mental slides.

In the middle of the evening's tumultuous closer, "Rhoda"—a song from "Tweez"—Walford twice screamed "One, two, three!" to cue the band back in. It was thrilling and a little startling, like watching an actor break character to pick up a stray prop. As Walford pounded away, McMahan and Pajo used their hands to make the only sounds that night which truly resembled singing, manipulating their guitars to create a noise like birdsong. The number ended abruptly, and a white screen came down, concealing the musicians. As the audience shuffled dutifully toward the doors, a faint echo of guitar feedback lingered in the air, and then died. ♦

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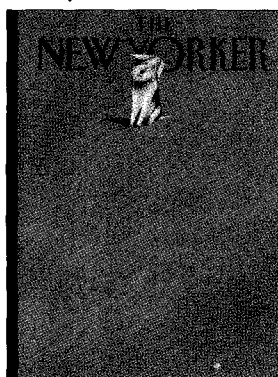
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THE THEATRE

SHADES OF BLACK

Race relations in *"This Is How It Goes"* and *"Julius Caesar."*

BY HILTON ALS

Jeffrey Wright is a brilliant American actor. At this point, it scarcely matters what he appears in: whatever play or film he lends his graceful frame and formidable imagination to yields levels of complexity, shades of light and dark, that sometimes go far beyond what is in the text. Wright finds his characters between the lines, in the pauses, silences, and white spaces of reflection that only the best actors—those who lock themselves into their characters' heartbeats, their way of being—can deliver. Unfortunately, for an actor of Wright's calibre who finds himself working (or not working) in today's entertainment industry, talent does not always equal financial gain or broad appeal. In that world, thought and nuance and the idiosyncrasies of character are a hindrance—particularly for an actor of color. The sad truth is that, for the most part, black actors aren't paid to act; they're paid to act *black*. ("I don't play black; I am black," Morgan Freeman said in a recent interview, as if it needed to be mentioned. And it did.) How do you play black? You play a white person's idea of it. Over and over—on MTV, on UPN, in the "Barbershop" movie franchise, and so on—we see one-dimensional coon shows in which an actor of color is invariably noble, "beat down," or a thug (with or without a head rag); blacks onstage and onscreen must be or live through a nightmare in order for whiteness to seem like a dream.

Neil LaBute probably believes that he has confronted this issue in his play *"This Is How It Goes"* (at the Public), but he has only reacted to it. A writer of ideas, LaBute subscribes to Artaud's theory that in order to make any kind of new theatre one has to remake it—conventional themes and approaches must be torn down. And LaBute, whose sensibility is part Pinter, part "Jackass," likes tearing things down; his work has covered misogyny, adultery, infanticide,

and the sexuality of the obese, among other taboo topics. But he leaves out one crucial element of the Artaudian equation: magic.

At the opening of *"This Is How It Goes,"* a character called Man (Ben Stiller) tells us a story: Man has moved back to his small home town, somewhere in America, after working as a lawyer, or so he says, and he has run into a young woman, Belinda (Amanda Peet), whom he secretly loved in high school. As it happens, Belinda and her husband, Cody (Wright), a developer, have a converted garage for rent on their property. Perhaps he would like to live there? He would. The living arrangement works for Man—one gets the sense that he's lonely, and that any family is better than no family at all—but Belinda and Cody's interracial marriage doesn't. Man has lived for years with a vision of Belinda's purity, which is now being defiled by Cody's black paranoia and discontent. Over a snack at a diner, Cody displays all the tiresome earmarks of the entitled (his father was a figure of some note in the town), while also playing what Man calls the "spade card." When he tries to catch the waitress's eye and she doesn't acknowledge him, he says, "Somebody else might as well try it, 'cause she ain't coming over here for me. Doesn't matter how many shops I open in the area, I'm flat outta luck when it comes to gettin' some *service*." Belinda is used to this kind of situation, and she sympathizes with Cody's outsider status. In fact, that may be one reason that she's married to him—she wants to mother away the hurt, while identifying with it. But another reason that Belinda is with Cody—a reason that the play's immensely gifted director, George C. Wolfe, makes clear—is the comfort that Cody's money and position afford her. She would not know what to do if she were not being looked after by someone. As Amanda Peet plays her—it's a great performance, full of need,

helpfulness, and incomprehension—Belinda is a victim of her own desire to be respected as a loving wife and friend.

But what do any of these qualities mean when the men she's surrounded by trample her like dirt? Her nurturing impulse amounts to nothing. In one disturbing scene, Man instructs us to watch Cody beating Belinda. Wright and Peet are fantastic in the scene. Afterward, however, Man admits that the cruelty we have just witnessed may not be real. ("Geez, I think I might end up being an unreliable narrator," he warns us, early in the play.) Whom, then, are we to rely on in this work about the ever-shifting perceptions and role-playing of characters defined by race or gender?

It is a great, and rare, thing to be unsettled in the theatre. LaBute accomplishes that here. I couldn't help wishing, though, that he were a better writer, or, at least, one less married to his didacticism. Perhaps LaBute's work on screenplays—including those for his movies "In the Company of Men," "Your Friends & Neighbors," and "The Shape of Things"—has rendered his theatrical plays more schematic than they need to be. You get the sense, in any case, that he hasn't truly decided what kind of writer he wants to be; his language seems to disavow naturalism, while his self-consciously gritty subject matter clings to it. It is clear, however, that LaBute wants "This Is How It Goes" to be literature, with a capital "L." He just doesn't want to cope with literature's demands: introspection, compassion.

Stiller, unfortunately, pays the highest price for this failure. He needs to project a depth that isn't on the page, and he can't. Having to switch back and forth between delivering monologues and being a character in the action seems to throw him off. How to play the monologues? As standup? And when he shares the stage with Wright, who makes a ferocious and pitiable Cody, you can see that he isn't up to the role. (The one actor who likely could have stood his ground with Wright and Peet is Robert Downey, Jr.)

"This Is How It Goes" marks Wright's ninth collaboration with Wolfe (their most recent being the HBO special "Lackawanna Blues"). It's a partnership that equals that of Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro, early in their careers. That Wright and Wolfe are not as lauded says

much about the limitations that race places on us, and, by extension, on our ideas about entertainment.

By agreeing to portray Brutus in Daniel Sullivan's staging of "Julius Caesar" (at the Belasco), the Academy Award-winning actor Denzel Washington has done Broadway a great ser-

continue exploring night after night.

The other actors here seem to be focussed less on investigating the play's meaning than on competing with Washington for their star turn. (You can feel them shrinking whenever he walks onstage.) William Sadler, who plays Caesar, hits one note again and again—a kind of strident, baffled dignity—which makes



Jeffrey Wright, Amanda Peet, and Ben Stiller in Neil LaBute's love-hate triangle.

vice: he has drawn black audiences into the theatre. And, since Washington has always been viewed as a model of exquisite nobility in the black community, why shouldn't he claim Shakespeare's morally confused and ultimately brokenhearted anti-hero as one more jewel in his acting crown? Regrettably, though, Washington has not managed to become Brutus. Instead, he has turned Brutus into a version of himself. Using mannerisms that will be familiar to his movie audiences—licking his lips to convey exasperation; flicking his fingers to demonstrate barely contained rage; throwing his shoulders back to express stoicism—Washington seems bored onstage, as if he were trapped in a character he feels no desire to

his death on the Ides of March more of a relief than a tragedy. Jessica Hecht, as Portia, is an anomaly in the cast (she was also a standout in last year's production of Arthur Miller's "After the Fall"). It is only when she takes the stage that we are reminded what Shakespeare can do for the right performer, and what he continues to give the world: a diagram of the soul, and the language to describe it. ♦

PSHAW DEPARTMENT

From the *Sequim (Wash.) Gazette*.

Sequim resident, author, and dog trainer Terry Ryan of Legacy Canine hosts DogSense, a five-day seminar for dog trainers and instructors, 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. March 10-14 at the Port Townsend fairgrounds. The seminar includes hands-on chicken training; skills students learn can be used to train a dog.

FEELINGS

"Sin City" and "A Hole in My Heart."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Here is something that we never thought to see. Something that exists beyond the bounds of logic: a scary Elijah Wood. Presumably, the actor looked around, seeking a film that would dispel the ripe aroma of Frodo Baggins, happened upon "Sin City," and found the role of Kevin—a mute, bespectacled type who removes the heads of young women and dines upon the rest of them. Wood is ominously good at the stillness of this maniac, which only doubles the shock. It's like discovering that Gandalf used to lure young hobbits into a shed and show them his special wand.

"Sin City" is based upon the graphic novels of Frank Miller, who co-directed the film with Robert Rodriguez. (The credits also list a "special guest director," one Quentin Tarantino.) There has been much rejoicing, in certain quarters, that the film so loyally apes the plots and panchache of Miller's original work, although fidelity alone proves nothing; as a Henry James reader, for instance, I would rather leave the country than sit through a film that honored every facet of "The Golden Bowl." For a while, my heart slumped under the suspicion that "Sin City" was to be a portmanteau affair: one mini-story following another, without a link. First, we get Hartigan (Bruce Willis), a cop with a heart condition—movie shorthand for having a heart—who saves an eleven-year-old girl from the claws of a creep (Nick Stahl). Next, there's a thug named Marv (Mickey Rourke), who spends the night with a seraphic whore, finds her dead in the morning, and vows vengeance on the meanie who set him up. On to Dwight (Clive Owen), who, having witnessed the scabrous Jackie Boy (Benicio Del Toro) turn rough with an ex-girlfriend, and then with the local hookers, decides to teach him some manners. And so back to Hartigan, many years on, who finds the little girl grown up, and the creep grown weirder still. The latter now functions under the sobriquet

of the Yellow Bastard, and, as Hartigan learns, if you punch him hard enough you get a fine spray of what appears to be banana custard.

By now, the various tales have looped together, our friend Kevin being one of the connectors, and you realize that Tarantino's task runs deeper than mere assistance, for it is to "Pulp Fiction" that

of the blood in "Sin City" emerges in white splashes, like lime. Endless gouts of it are shed in the course of the film, as if the characters were taunting us and saying, If you prick us, do we not bleed? Or, if this be not blood but a luminous exercise in drip-painting, did the pricking really hurt?

That is the sole matter of interest, as opposed to impact, that arises from the film. Nothing is easier than to tumble under the spell of its savage comedy—Marv driving along with the door open, say, holding another guy down so that his head is roughly sanded by the road, or Jackie Boy continuing to chatter with his throat cut. We have, it is clear, reached the lively dead end of a process that was initiated by a fretful Martin Scorsese



"Sin City" is based upon the graphic novels of Frank Miller, who co-directed the film.

"Sin City" obediently bows. What binds and clads the new movie most thoroughly, however, is not storytelling but the high pressure of atmosphere. The viewer is wreathed in shades of monochrome—deep but interrupted, like a restless sleep, pocked here and there by sudden scars of color. In the opening scene, a black-and-white metropolis unfurls enormously before us, yet close to the lens we see a girl in a blood-red dress, and the emerald flaring of her eyes. This is a conceit that harks back to Abel Gance's "Napoleon," to Tati's "Jour de Fête," and, lately, to "Schindler's List," thus proving itself in a range of moods, but urban disaffection suits it best. Some

and inflamed, with less embarrassed glee, by Tarantino: the process of knowing everything about violence and nothing about suffering. There are wrinkles of unease in "Sin City," mostly to do with the little girl, but its presentation of a closed, comic-strip universe is otherwise without flaw—and thus, by implication, without feeling. Miller and Rodriguez perform their duties with unstinting vigor, and there are wonderful turns from Carla Gugino, in the humdrum role of a nude lesbian parole officer, and from Mickey Rourke, whose granite-based makeup and musculature, though hilarious, are still not as freaky to behold as the actual Mickey Rourke. The sad

thing is that the youthful, iron-skinned audience at whom the film is aimed will trumpet their belief that "Sin City" offers something new—not merely in its bewildering technique but in its vision of scarified urban souls. Needless to say, a short course in movie history would teach them that graphic novels themselves are soaked to the bone in a style that was brought to refinement by film noir. It might even lead them to a basic triple bill of "The Big Heat," "Out of the Past," and "Sweet Smell of Success." There they would learn that the duel of shadow and glitter did not start life on a computer screen, that not all women are prostitutes with weapons strapped to their thighs, and that the drive to avenge—which is what fuels "Sin City," to the point of perversion—can bring more pain than satisfaction in its wake. "It's the old days," Marv muses. "They're back." I hate to say this, Marv, but for some of us they never went away.

On the grounds of probability, it seems natural that Lukas Moodysson should be due to disappoint. His first three movies—"Show Me Love," "Together," and "Lilya 4-Ever"—constitute the finest opening streak of the past decade. Throughout, he has kept the scale small: sundered families, the pillaging of innocence, sex as both playground and war zone. For "A Hole in My Heart," the latest and least of his works, all his concerns return, in monstrous magnification.

In a Swedish apartment, Rickard (Thorsten Flinck) lives with his teen-aged son Eric (Björn Almroth), who stays in his bedroom with headphones gripping his skull. The boy's desire to stave off whatever happens in the next room

is understandable, since the sebaceous Rickard is knee-deep in a pornographic film—planning it and filming it, but also being sucked into the action. The whole thing is conducted within the safety of their own home, although we should note that home, in a Moodysson picture, can be the least safe and most corrosive of environments. This place, especially, is about as peaceful as a dog pound. While Rickard's pair of performers, Tess (Sanna Bråding) and Geko (Goran Marjanović), are put through their paces, their squelches, and their groans, Eric tries not to look, and you soon find yourself in the same position. There is very little sex on display, and what remains is razed of pleasure; since Moodysson is not a pornographer but an anatomist of pornography's effect, we are duly treated to a montage of chopped-up dolls and close-ups of genital surgery. Even Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino might be cut off in mid-giggle.

Indeed, "A Hole in My Heart" makes a useful companion to "Sin City." Rodriguez is pleased to flash his hipster credentials, proud of the hole where his heart is supposed to be, whereas Moodysson cannot film a threatening gesture without reminding us that somebody's heart has received another blow. The trouble with such rawness is that it quickens the festering of anger, and this is the first occasion on which Moodysson has lost his balance, allowing his wrath to outweigh the charity that he used to extend to even the most boorish of his characters. If the new film argues that pornography degrades and all but dissolves the women in its thrall, the argument is hardly controversial, and the ferocity with which it is branded onto our eyes

is so unrelenting that—disastrously—we grow not so much revolted as bored.

And yet, and yet. If you watch this movie (as you will watch it) in a lowly theatre, with a scattering of queasy folk, you might not make it through. But when you watch it (as I watched it) at a film festival, in a cinema of eight hundred and thirty-two seats, every one of them occupied, something strange may overtake you—a grim, communal determination to stay with these wretched characters in their hour and a half of need. On the day I saw "A Hole in My Heart," there were fewer than a dozen walkouts. Then came the point at which Tess and Geko reach absolute moral zero—the pits of degradation, of a kind that I will not describe (save to hint that it involves the forcible exchange of a waste product), and have no wish to witness again. At that exact moment, we hear the last chorus from the St. Matthew Passion—"Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder." It roared from the speakers, and I felt eight hundred people or more rocked back, as if by a wave. From that there was no recovery. We stumbled out, and in the succeeding days I found myself playing the piece over and over, not in order to relive a noxious movie but because the Bach had regained its grave and devastating function. It has become, for too many of us, a concert piece, or something dignified to put on the CD player at the end of a fissile day. Suddenly, thanks to Lukas Moodysson, I heard it again as a Passion: the drama of Calvary, stern with lamentation. The question is: do we need to be hauled through scene after scene of drab, dehumanized behavior so that we may see, or at least hear, humanity restored at the end? ♦

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